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ABSTRACT

This practicum, which sought to improve parents' involvement in the development of educational goals for their children with disabilities, had three objectives: improved attendance by parents at Individual Education Plan (IEP) conferences, increased parent participation in the decision-making process during IEP development, and enhanced parent perception of their importance in assuming roles as equal partners with members of the multidisciplinary team during IEP development. Six components comprised the program: teacher inservice sessions in communication and conferencing techniques, parent/professional workshops to facilitate the acquisition of parent knowledge, establishment of an oral and written communication network to provide information and assistance to parents, networking with parents and various relevant advisory committees, parent involvement in their children's classrooms and involvement of all shareholders including the students. The practicum found that parents are willing participants in the IEP process when they have a clear definition of their roles, rights, and responsibilities; the full intent of Public Law 94-142 can be realized by effective parent participation in the IEP process; and parent self-esteem is greatly enhanced when quality programs are available to address their needs. Appendices contain a teacher questionnaire, parent questionnaire, and teacher observation form. (Contains 37 references.) (JDD)

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Empowering Parents of Junior High School Resource Students with Specific Learning Disabilities During the Individual Education Plan Process

by

Alice E. Buckner

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A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Alice E. Buckenr under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulillment of the requirements for degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

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Date of Final Approval of Report

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SEP 08 1992

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

TITLE PAGE i
APPROVAL PAGE ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS iii
ABSTRACT v

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION 1
    Description of the Work Setting and Community . . . 1
    Writer's Work Setting and Role 7
II. STUDY OF THE PROBLEM 9
    Problem Description 15
    Problem Documentation 18
    Causative Analysis 23
    Relationship of the Problem to the Literature . . . 25
III. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS 48
    Goals and Expectations 48
    Behavioral Objectives 48
    Measurement of Objectives 50
IV. SOLUTION STRATEGY 52
    Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions 52
    Description of Selected Solution 95
    Report of Action Taken 100
V. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 138
    Results 138
    Discussion 142

SEP 08 1992

Recommendations 146
Dissemination 148

REFERENCES 150

APPENDICES 154

A TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE 156

B PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE 159

C TEACHER OBSERVATION FORM 163

ABSTRACT

Empowering Parents of Junior high School SLD Resource Students During the IEP Process. Melbourne, FL, 1992: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Descriptors: Parent Involvement/ Parent Participation/ Parent/School Partnerships/ Parent/Teacher Partnerships/ Teaming in the Junior High School Setting/ Business Involvement in Secondary Education/ Multi-Disciplinary Teams in Secondary Schools/ Parent Participation in the IEP Process/ Parent Involvement in the IEP Process.

The practicum was undertaken to improve parents' involvement in the development of educational goals for their children. Three objectives underlay the project: improved attendance by parents at their childrens' Individual Education Plan (IEP) conference; increased participation in the decision-making process during IEP development; enhanced parent perception of their own importance in assuming roles as equal partners with members of the multi-disciplinary team during IEP development.

Program development was based on parent needs relative to attendance and full participation in the IEP process. Six components comprised the program: teacher inservices in communication and conferencing techniques; parent/professional workshops were conducted to facilitate the acquisition of parent knowledge; an oral and written communication network was established to provide parent information and assistance; *all* shareholders were included in the decision-making process by networking with parents and various relevant advisory committees; parent involvement in their childrens' educational environment (classroom).

The results of the practicum were excellent. All three objectives were achieved and surpassed. The project gained the attention and support of many school-based personnel. The data derived from the practicum was indicative of the following; (a) parents are willing participants in the IEP process when they have been sufficiently apprised of the context, a clear definition of roles has been developed, and their rights and responsibilities have been defined, (b) the full intent of PL 94-142 can be realized by effective

parent participation in the IEP process, and (c) parent self esteem is greatly enhanced when quality programs are available to address their multi-needs relative to their childrens' educations.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Description of Work Setting and Community

Amidst a southern east coast community of approximately 64,000, the school site where the practicum will take place has been significantly impacted by the rapidly changing profile of its student population. With the advent of hi-tech industries came a shift in demographics which produced a commensurate transformation in ideological orientation. A once conservative, neighborhood school, the 29 year old junior high has had to adapt to the mutating socio-academic needs of a community in transition. To address its recently acquired inner-city configuration, a paradigm shift became imminent.

Emerging from an extant enrollment of approximately 5,200 students at the seven feeder elementary schools, the educational facility's socio-economically diverse population is comprised of approximately 87 percent white and 13 percent minority students. Thirty-two percent of the student body avails itself of free or reduced lunch, and the primary mode of transportation for its current population of 1,314 students is by bus --- thus contributing to the dissolution of the cohesive characteristics that are typical of neighborhood schools. Facilities include administrative and general offices, guidance department, media center, vocational centers, cafeteria, gymnasium, a new computer lab, and 58 well ventilated classrooms with natural light and 18 updated portable classrooms. Committed to a standard of educational excellence which has been dictated by the school's holistic philosophy, a seasoned faculty collaborates to provide an integrated experience through the teaming effort. While the average enrollment over the past three years has been 1,200, three year projections provide for a growth rate of approximately 65 students annually.

In an ongoing struggle to meet the diverse needs of the student population, *all* school personnel are committed to the employment of creative and innovative strategies. Buoyed by an administrative philosophy that is deeply rooted in a pragmatic, humanistic approach to education, the 72 member faculty consistently aspires to provide team oriented, integrated programs that encompass both the affective and academic interests of students. Strong leadership, multi-dimensional programs, creative teaching styles, and parent and community involvement are the critical elements that underlie this innovative approach to the learning experience.

Sixty-four basic education teachers operate within a transitional phasing structure within a teaming format which will ultimately evolve to a non-phased learning environment over the next few years. Moreover, eight exceptional education teachers render a full range of services to more than 12 percent of the total school population. Offering four special education programs which include Emotionally Handicapped (full time/transitional), Gifted, Specific Learning Disabilities (self-contained/full time), and Specific Learning Disabilities (resource/part time-consultative orientation), each exceptional teacher and four full time paraprofessionals facilitate mainstreaming objectives. Excepting self-contained learners, exceptional education students enjoy the same seven-period, daily rotation schedule as those who attend all basic education classes. Parallel curriculum to basic education classes is provided to facilitate lateral mainstreaming. Deeply committed to the full mainstreaming objectives of the Regular Education Initiative (REI), special educators work in concert with basic education teachers to provide interventional strategies within the regular education environment.

To address the differentiated needs of students, parents, and community in the co-mingling process, a global perspective has been adopted by all school-based personnel. Administrative support for parent and community involvement has offered students the opportunity to associate academic objectives with real-world situations. Two such orientations are the state sponsored parent volunteer program and the district-adopted Mentor Program. The former provides for an infusion of parent services within the educational complex. The latter is predicated upon the concept that role models from the business sector will aid students in developing a rationale for educational pursuit based on real-world expectation. Both contribute invaluable human resources to the overall educational endeavor.

Clearly, administrative sensitivity to the socio-economic and political issues that impact the public education mechanism has resulted in a massive, collaborative effort to improve the target educational setting. Including all shareholders in the process, the primary administrator recently made an impassioned plea to the School Board for total revamping of the 29 year old facility in addition to requesting a new wing to accommodate a rapidly growing student population. Notwithstanding enormous constraints on the current budget, the Board was significantly impressed with the quality and integrity of the presentation as well as the school's multi-faction support system. As a result, the allocation for total renovation and a new wing has been realized. However, administrative efforts have certainly not been limited to facility enhancement.

On a broader scale, the School Improvement Committee (SIC), a product of a state sponsored program which was patterned after the national agenda, was one of the district's first to be organized --- an initiative that was administratively oriented. A viable means by which all shareholders (administration, parents, teachers, facilities personnel, students, and the business sector) have the opportunity to collaborate in the evolutionary process associated with the goals and ideals of America 2000: An Education Strategy (1991), the SIC enjoys the support and enthusiasm of all vested parties. Within the context of school-sponsored, extracurricular activities and meetings, members are consistently provided with opportunities to maximize their potential for skilled collaboration.

Problem Identification Within the Educational Complex

Despite the school's open policy regarding parent involvement in all aspects of its educational objectives, effective parent participation in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process involving students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) was still lacking --- a debilitating situation that provided a rationale for on-site project development. The problem appeared to be twofold. First, parent attendance at the IEP conference was clearly in need of improvement. Second, a problem of equal magnitude, many parents who had consistently attended IEP conferences were failing to make effective contributions during the development of the educational goals that are so critical to the eventuality of a successful outcome. Considering the enormous obligations that routinely encumber parents of exceptional children, the temptation to displace the responsibility for their childrens' educations to school-based personnel is understandable. Overwhelmed by a variety of personal, familial, and societal considerations, parents frequently allude to the expertise of professionals. Nonetheless, effective parent participation is critical to the maximization of student potential as it applies to educational goals. Given both the writer's commitment to the ideological framework that supports full parent participation in the IEP process and the positive support system within the school setting, it was apparent that favorable conditions existed in which to encourage both parent participation and efficacy during IEP development.

Writer Role in the Educational Format

Assuming a multi-faceted role within the school and community setting, the writer teaches Language Arts and learning strategies and provides interventional services to SLD students through the Consultative Model. Current areas of certification include psychology, specific learning disabilities, and gifted education. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in social studies/psychology, a Master of Science degree in specific learning disabilities and gifted education, and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree. As a Demonstration Classroom Teacher for a district sponsored program and as supervising instructor of interns for a major university, the writer provides on-site inservice opportunities to local educators as well as to aspiring teachers. An active member of the school's Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), School Improvement Committee (SIC), and Guidance Committee, and as sponsor of the National Junior Honor Society, the writer adopts a liaison position with regard to parent, student, and community activities. Moreover, the writer is committed to school reform which manifests in active involvement in a number of professionally oriented activities: President - Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Board Member of the 11th district Congressional Education Advisory Committee, Chairperson - Very Special Arts Advisory Committee (state mandated), member of the district-wide Exceptional Education Advisory Committee (state mandated), member of the district-wide Alternative Education Task Committee, member of a doctoral-level networking team for America 2000: An Education Strategy, and member of the Nova University doctoral level Student/Graduate Advisory Committee.

CHAPTER II

Study of the Problem

Having arrived at a time in history where the quality of public education is subject to severe scrutiny, educators are in the process of revamping according to a national agenda. Addressing a group of dignitaries on April 18, 1991, the president maintained that "education determines not just which students will succeed, but also which nations will thrive in a world united in pursuit of freedom in enterprise (p.1)." Responding dynamically to the nation's need to recapture the competitive edge in international markets, President Bush appealed to the American people to ideologically reinvest in the children of tomorrow by supporting the objectives of America 2000: An Education Strategy (Sourcebook, 1991). Predicated upon the achievement of six national goals, the program focuses on the preservation and acceleration of the nation's status in world markets by creating a work force to maintain a competitive edge through educational excellence. Underlying the objective is the concept of leadership by collaborative effort. Involving parents, teachers, schools, and communities, a team effort will be employed

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to effect the paradigm shift that is required to achieve the national goals.

However, collaboration is by no means a function that originated within the public school system. Rising of necessity within the business sector to safeguard its competetive interests in international markets, "employee involvement" has become a mainstay in American corporations during the last decade. Routinely lauding the effects of employee participation through team orientation and shared decision-making, corporations of renown status such as General Electric (Hoerr, 1989), General Mills (Dumaine, 1990), and Miller Brewing Company (Schumer, 1989) contend that effective partnerships between management, unions, and employees are critical to national economic interests. Placing enormous emphasis on collaboration, business has encouraged educators to adopt real-world orientations in providing educational instruction and experience.

Moreover, parents have become extremely influential in effecting change in public schools in the years following the 1983 report to the nation by The National Commission on Excellence in Education. Raising the consciousness of the nation at large, the report documents the alarmingly high student drop-out rate and the enormous competency deficiency that exists among America's high school graduates (A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Research, 1983). To that end, parents were to surface in large numbers to demand accountability of the public schools relative to the provision of quality education for the nation's children and youth. Clearly, that collaborative effort was to set the stage for educational reform.

In response to parent influence and pressure from the business community to produce high school graduates who have inculcated skills that address the requirements of a contemporary work force, schools have moved toward a more global perspective in administering to the needs and interests of students. Perhaps the most significant example of shared decision-making in public schools is evidenced by the overall presence of the newly adopted School Improvement Committees (SIC) --- a product of current state guidelines which parallel the national agenda for school improvement. Focusing attention on the concept that all shareholders should participate in the development of goals and objectives to meet the educational needs of students, the committees are state mandated to include students, parents, administrators, a union representative, classified employees, and members of the business community.

Invested in the concept that reaching consensus is a critical factor in achieving successful outcomes, the current school administration has moved to provide numerous inservices to allow all vested parties the opportunity to become proficient in collaborative processes. Moreover, meetings are routinely scheduled to provide an open forum for input from all factions relevant to new issues as they develop. Because of the supportive atmosphere in which all parties are encouraged to freely express ideas and concerns, a number of issues which have historically attracted extremely diverse opinion have been amicably resolved. As a result, parents and members of the business community have been quick to respond to the challenges that face public education today. Providing a myriad of invaluable services within the framework of state sponsored volunteer programs, both factions seek opportunities to serve schools in varying capacities (i.e., School Improvement Committee, members of problem solving teams, clerical support, and club assistance). However, despite the acknowledged increase in active parent participation relative to the overall school objectives, there was minimal improvement over time in parent attendance and/or effective participation during

Individual Education Plan (IEP) conferences for SLD resource students.

Certainly the goals and objectives of educators who administer to the differentiated needs and interests of handicapped children are directly parallel to those that shape the interests of the national agenda, parent advocacy groups, and the nation's business concerns. Underlying all aspects of exceptional student education are the basic tenets of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) which was passed by Congress in 1975 and became a reality in the public school system by 1977. With aspirations geared toward the provision of quality education for handicapped children, within the least restrictive environment possible, this single legislative act paved the way for the provision of special services within the public education format (Lerner, 1985). Among the numerous, considered precepts of the law is that which concerns the right and responsibility of parents to become actively involved in the development of their child's IEP.

Historical Perspectives

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, programs for children with handicaps began to surface in the public school system throughout the country. Parents were prime motivators in raising public consciousness, and the national sentiment began to shift toward the provision of special services. However, no other indicator so clearly testified to the national consensus as did the enactment of the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). Guaranteeing a free, appropriate, public education for all handicapped children, the legislation included the express stipulation that an Individual Education Program (IEP), in which parents participate as full and equal members of the IEP team, be created on the basis of the differentiated needs of the individual child (Lerner, 1985).

Because the revolutionary front that provided the impetus for this landmark legislation was comprised of dynamic parent movements, it was assumed that the long awaited opportunity to become full and equal partners in the IEP process would be welcomed. Nonetheless, parents were not as responsive to the call for collaboration with professionals in developing educational goals and objectives for their children as anticipated. As a result, interventions were ultimately employed by school systems to encourage the required participation. While, in time, invitations to attend IEP conferences began to be more readily accepted, it became evident that "parent attendance" and "parent participation" were entirely different orientations and that the expectation of parent involvement was subject to broad interpretation by both parents themselves and by professionals within the schools their children were attending. Thus, a number of questions surfaced within the psycho/educational community regarding the specific types of behaviors that should be considered indicative of "parent involvement" during the development of the IEP (Lynch and Stein, 1982). Essentially, it was this enigma that provided the basis for the practicum project.

Problem Description

The existing problem in the writer's educational setting was that, despite both written and telephone notification prior to the IEP conference, a substantial number of parents of junior high school resource students with specific learning disabilities were failing to attend scheduled IEP conferences. Of the attending parents, most did not effectively participate in the IEP conference --- an indicator that suggested a lack of integration between parents and school personnel relative to the IEP process. Assuming a largely passive role, parents tended to limit interactions with the conference team to either receptive or inquiry modes. Rarely did a parent, within the construct of the IEP conference, adopt an active, participative stance.

In as much as parent involvement is prioritized in all aspects of the school philosophy and all exceptional educators are committed to a unified concept of parent/school partnerships, the problem of parental failure to attend and/or effectively participate in the development of viable educational goals and objectives for their children was of primary concern. To study the situation further, a Quality Circle, which was comprised of four exceptional education teachers, convened on three occasions during the previous school year to review current procedures and to brainstorm ideas to improve parent attendance and participation. Although teachers from basic education and other exceptionalities demonstrated a keen interest in attending meetings, the constructs of planning periods within the "teaming" structure at the school setting prohibited active participation at meetings. Nonetheless, consistent quality input was received from that quarter.

Upon completion of the analysis of current methodology, members made four recommendations which were geared to encourage parent participation. First, it was decided that exceptional educators would seek district level expertise and resources for the express purpose of improving parent attendance and/or effective participation during the IEP conference meeting. Second, it was determined that SLD teachers would conduct a special orientation evening at the beginning of the following school year to introduce and provide quality information regarding the overall philosophy and methodology that underlie the dynamics of the program. During the delineation of the IEP process, a rationale was to be developed with specific emphasis placed on the critical importance of establishing parent/school partnerships. Third, SLD teachers would continue to maintain constant written and verbal contact regarding student status, and consistently work toward developing close parent/teacher relationships in order to maximize student potential. Fourth, with the aid of district resource personnel from the exceptional education department, both teacher and parent questionnaires would be developed for use during the 1991-1992 school year to obtain information relative to parent involvement during the IEP process. In addition, it was determined that a teacher observation form would be designed for teacher use during the IEP conference to record the type and incidence of parent input.

Despite these interventions and the fact that increasing numbers of parents were currently participating in and supporting a variety of adjunct activities (i.e., dances, sports, and clubs) which involved both basic and exceptional education students, only a minimal increase had been realized in parent attendance and/or productive participation during the development of the IEP. Clearly, there was a demonstrable need to improve both parent attendance and/or performance during IEP development in the target setting. The existing problem was that a substantial number of parents of junior high school SLD resource students who should have been actively engaged in the planning of their childrens' IEPs were either declining to attend IEP conferences or were failing to assume participative roles during the planning stages of the IEP, causing the full intent of PL 94-142 not to be realized. To that end, a solution strategy was implemented via the practicum effort.

Problem Documentation

In order to fulfill the federal requirement that a student be provided with a newly developed IEP at least once a year, it is standard procedure in the practicum setting to conduct IEP conferences at specified times: during the first month of the school year; when schedule changes are effected; or at the end of the school year. In accordance with exceptional education district policy, as it relates to PL 94-142, two parent notifications regarding IEP meetings are issued. First, a written invitation which allows for ten days notice of the upcoming scheduled IEP conference is mailed to parents and guardians. Second, verbal notification takes place via telephone a few days prior to the scheduled date. During this time, SLD teachers have the opportunity to reinforce partnership ideology and provide parents with information about the upcoming conference format and multi-disciplinary team configuration. Although records indicate that these procedures have been followed according to stipulated criteria, many parents continued to avoid the conference meeting entirely or chose to adopt a passive role during the decision making process.

Despite numerous interventions to include parents in the IEP process, only minimal improvement had been realized. As a result, the writer was committed to seeking an appropriate solution strategy to effect productive parent participation during the development of their child's educational goals and objectives. To that end, three approaches were adopted to ascertain both the existence and scope of the problem.

First, on November 4, 1991, a comprehensive review of the school's total IEPs of record was undertaken by the writer to determine the incidence of parental non-attendance. Global in perspective, it was intended to establish the overall parental response rate to the invitation process for the IEP conference. Comprised of 208 exceptional education audit files, 90 related to SLD students. Of the 90 SLD conferences which were conducted at the onset of the 1991/1992 school year, 59 were parent-attended. Although most of the 90 students were enrolled in from one to three exceptional education courses, a fluctuating number of these students were fully mainstreamed. When this status is effected, students are serviced in a monitoring capacity within the regular education setting. The number of students in this category at any given time varies depending upon student need and performance. In keeping with school policy, when any student file indicates a sub-standard performance, the case is presented to the Guidance Committee for a comprehensive review and possible reactivation of exceptional services.

Second, on November 5, 1991, school-designed Teacher Questionnaires (See Appendix A) were distributed to SLD resource teachers to determine the quality of participation among those parents who attended annual IEP conferences. Four teachers were involved and a 100% return rate was experienced within three days. Data revealed that 32 of the 59 attending parents contributed substantially to IEP development according to specified criteria (parent participation in the decision-making process).

Third, on November 5, 1991, school-designed Parent Questionnaires were mailed to the 90 parents of SLD resource students to determine the reasons for nonattendance and nonparticipation during the developmental process of the IEP (See Appendix B). Within ten days, only 46 forms had been returned. Follow-up phone calls were made by the writer to encourage parents to return the questionnaires. Within three days, 31 of the remaining 44 outstanding forms were received. In order to collect as much data as possible, the writer made a second phone call to remind the 13 non-respondents and to advise them that a self-addressed, stamped envelope had been mailed to facilitate the return. Within eight days, all questionnaires had been received. The resulting data indicated that, of the 59 attending parents, five maintained that there was no purpose in attending IEP conferences, 49 contended that they lacked sufficient knowledge about the IEP conference to make a significant contribution (of which 41 were unconcerned), and five parents indicated that they were fully participative during the process.

In view of the discrepancy between teacher and parent questionnaires, it appeared to the writer that a a certain misperception existed --- a condition to which Lynch and Stein alluded in a 1982 study. According to the authors, "parent attendance" and "parent participation" may be subject to broad interpretation by both parents and professionals.

Having documented both the existence and scope of the problem, selection criteria was established for the practicum participants. Thus, the following standards were applied. First, parenthood or legal guardianship of a currently enrolled SLD resource student must have been documented prior to project implementation for each member. Second, the parent or guardian must have been invited to at least one IEP conference meeting within the current school year. Thus, all parents or guardians who fulfilled the previous requirements became eligible to participate in the proposed practicum project.

Screening procedures for practicum participants began on November 20, 1991. Parent eligibility was determined by a comprehensive review of the IEP and cumulative files of SLD resource students to determine parenthood or guardianship status and to ascertain whether the candidate had been invited to an IEP conference within the current school year. As a result, 90 parents and guardians were selected to participate in the proposed practicum project.

Causative Analysis

A number of probable causes impacted the problem situation at the education setting in the areas of both parental nonattendance and parental nonparticipation. Observations and preliminary data revealed the six following categories.

First, many parents were simply failing to assume a responsible role in the education of their children. Often unintentional, there was a prevailing expectation among parents in this category that school personnel are competent to make the best educational decisions and that they bear the primary responsibility for establishing educational goals for their children. Therefore, IEP conference invitations were often ignored or declined.

Second, in cases where families of SLD resource students were dysfunctional (i.e., physical or mental illness, family conflict or financial problems), parents tended to be disengaged from the interests of their children. In dealing with them, it was apparent that the emotional and economic complex had become so overwhelming that educational objectives for their children received a very low priority. As a result, they frequently ignored the invitation.

Third, certain parents may have been discouraged from participating in the IEP conference because they felt inadequate to deal with the sophisticated language of conference participants and with the IEP document itself. As a result, there was a predisposition for passivity because of a deficient knowledge base.

Fourth, there was a faction of parents that failed to respond to IEP conference invitations because of preconceived notions of the event. Having been subjected to conferences in which previous school personnel had adopted an adversarial position during the

IEP process, these parents were unwilling to subject themselves to the possibility of a repeat performance.

Fifth, parents of mildly handicapped students who had demonstrated chronic failure profiles relative to academics and/or behavior were often totally disenchanted with exceptional education programs. Having a tendency to attribute student failure to the exceptional program itself, they usually ignored all attempts to effect parent involvement in the developmental process.

Sixth, families with single parent headings often alluded to school professionals in the determination of their child's educational goals because of incapacitation that resulted from burdensome responsibilities and enormous time constraints. Thus, it appeared that a variety of factors, in either single mode or in concert with one another, had the potential to substantially influence parent attendance and/or participation in the IEP process.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Substantial evidence exists within the literature to establish the pervasiveness of parent disinvolvement in the IEP process. Typically, the problem manifests in one of two modes: either the parent fails to attend the IEP conference or is nonparticipative during the decision making effort. Although the subject of parent participation in the development of the child's IEP has been a subject of scrutiny by the educational community for some time, the problem of parent failure to effectively collaborate with members of the multidisciplinary team remains a mystery. Despite the enormous emphasis that has been attributed to parent involvement since the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), many parents continue to fail to exercise their legal right and responsibility to attend and effectively participate in IEP development.

Although numerous factors appear to influence parent reluctance to actively participate during IEP development, three significant categories serve to encompass the underlying causes of parent apathy: lack of attendance of key professionals at the IEP conference, the acceptance by parents and educators of an ideology that relegates parents to an information-based rather than a decision-making role, and a deficient parental knowledge base relative to both the child's disability and the IEP process itself.

Lack of Professional Participation

Conducting a study to determine parent satisfaction with the degree of professional participation at the IEP conference, Scanlon, Arick, and Phelps (1981) found broad dissatisfaction among parents regarding the lack of attendance of key educational personnel at their childrens' IEP conferences. Encompassing a comprehensive analysis of 168 questionnaires, the study was comprised of parents from the state of Oregon who had attended an IEP conference meeting.

Seven different handicapping conditions were involved. Analysis of the data indicated that most IEP conferences included only the mother and a special education teacher. Further analysis of the data suggested that parents were inordinately discouraged by the lack of professional participation at the conference. Emphasizing the importance of the multi-disciplinary team concept, the authors maintain that both the attendance of professionals from a variety of orientations and participation of the regular classroom teacher is absolutely critical to a successful mainstreaming effort. Although all school personnel attending to exceptional education students in the practicum setting have continuously demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity to their needs, time constraints have often prevented the attendance of basic education teachers and certain relevant professionals. While, for the most part, sufficient attending professionals have been available to constitute a multi-disciplinary team, the overall configuration of the team may have been enhanced by contributions from professionals within the social service community.

Parent and Professional Perceptions

Professional Attributions

Another influencing factor relative to parent attendance and/or participation involves the attributions of school personnel. However inadvertently, professionals often convey the idea to parents that parental roles are intended to be information-based rather than decision based.
For instance, in examining the then current rate of parent participation in IEP objectives, the obstacles to parent involvement in the IEP process, the extent to which parent participation has the potential to increase student opportunity for successful outcomes, and the issue of specific behaviors that constitute parent involvement, Morgan (1982) focused on the influence of parent participation on student educational programs.

Delineating a number of causal factors, the author contends that one of the more obvious reasons for parent apathy lies in the tendency of professionals to create barriers by implying that educators possess a level of expertise to which parents should allude.
Although inadvertent, it is entirely possible that practicum setting educators may actually foster apathetic parent response. Burdened by time constraints, exceptional education teachers tend to develop IEP goals and objectives in advance of the conference. Although written within the conference configuration, parents may receive a subtle message that indicates their predisposition.

Introducing the "mere parent myth" in a prior work, Cutler (1981) presented a school based ideology which implies that "parents always know less and are less capable than professionals (p. 19)." While school personnel within the practicum settings are certainly not intentionally engaged in alienating parents by assuming superior roles, they are often expected to bear the sole responsibility for establishing education goals and objectives because the parent lacks the knowledge base to effectively participate.

Parental Information Base

Still another impactor, according to Morgan (1982), is the failure on the part of schools to provide both accurate and adequate information to parents in the IEP conference notice --- a situation that causes many to feel less than welcome during the IEP meeting. According to the author, the lack of adequate information diminishes the potential of parents to effectively collaborate with professionals to develop a feasible educational plan for their children.

Concurring, Goldstein and Turnbull (1982) found that parents who were provided with relevant information, coupled with a positive support system, were far more likely to be effective participants during the IEP conference than those who were not. Although some school systems have expanded efforts to address the parent-oriented goals which were specified by the federal mandate (PL 94-142), the authors contend that parent-professional partnerships still leave much to be desired some fifteen years after the fact --- a situation that is clearly reminiscent of the problem within the practicum setting.

Despite the fact that numerous interventions had been attempted to encourage greater parent involvement in the IEP process at the practicum site, the desired outcome had not yet been realized. In reflecting on the studies of Morgan and Goldstein and Turnbull (1982), it became apparent that educators within the practicum setting may be failing to facilitate parent participation in the IEP process by limiting conference notification to the date, time, and place rather than providing relevant information regarding conference format, role definition, and intended goals.

Parents as Decision Makers

According to Yoshida (1982), many parents are simply not willing to assume the role of active decision maker. One reason, according to the author, is that parents are not always effective in that capacity because school systems lack the interest in adopting facilitative programs to encourage parent participation in the collaborative effort. Another reason, presented in the 1984 Witt, Miller, McIntyre, and Smith study, is that many parents are quite comfortable in a passive mode --- a condition that has often been indicated by exceptional education teachers in the practicum setting. Rather than feeling like second class citizens during the team meeting, some parents actually appear to be relieved that there is no expectation of participation.

Parent Passivity

Still another cause that is consistently associated with parent disinvolvement is introduced by Freeman, Gavron, and Williams (1981) wherein it is speculated that the passive nature of public education, of which the parent is usually a product, has actually conditioned parents to assume passive positions when in an educational environment. Thus, there is some indication that certain parents actually allow themselves to be relegated to a lesser responsibility level than that of other participating members of the IEP team. Much in evidence at the practicum setting, many parents who routinely attend IEP conferences have a tendency to be non-participative. Assuming an inactive posture, they appear to be comfortable in the role of information-receiver and typically allude to team professionals during the decision-making process.

Despite the existence of PL 94-142, which clearly requires that parents become equal members of the IEP multi-disciplinary team, parent involvement has failed to become a credible force in the decision making process as it relates to the development of an IEP for exceptional students. In a 1988 study which examined parent impressions of IEP conference activities, Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, and Lasky found that most parents who attended conferences were either minimally involved or non-participative with regard to the decision making process. Moreover, school personnel appeared to attribute the role of "onlooker" to parents rather than to consider them as active participants during IEP process development. Although most parents expressed satisfaction with the conference outcomes, they voluntarily assumed largely passive roles throughout the process.

Widely documented in the literature, it is generally conceded in the educational community that a high percentage of parents who do attend IEP conferences tend to assume passive roles. Gilliam and Coleman (1981) maintain that parent involvement in IEP development is essential to the creation and maintenance of effective educational policies for handicapped children. Nonetheless, the study found parents to be virtually inactive during the educational development conference. Finding the problem to be twofold, the authors described the conflict. First, parents appear to accept a passive role as the expected standard for their responsibility level. In other words, parent perception of the process holds that it is professionals who make the decisions and parent performance is is intended to be largely confined to signing the IEP and receiving information from the drafters of the educational plan. Second, professionals also tend to regard parent roles in much the same light.

Aware of the fact that parents are often at a disadvantage, educators tend to automatically assume total responsibility for development and implementation of the IEP. Providing parents with a copy of the document and furnishing a clarification relevant to conference decisions appears to be the extent of perceived responsibility. Thus, the problem of nonparticipation of parents during IEP development is compounded by the perceptions of both parents and educators. For instance, in the practicum setting, it was not at all uncommon for educators to accept total responsibility for drafting the IEP and providing parents with a rationale for its construct.

Upon synthesizing the data relative to parent passivity from 26 conferences which were conducted to determine eligibility for placement in SLD programs, the authors determined that four reasons for parent assumption of passive roles underlie the problem. First, a level of satisfaction was expressed by parents under conditions where they were not chastised for creating the child's problem, enough time was allocated for the conference, and when several professionals were involved in the decision making process. Second, parents lacked knowledge of the disability which would have been required to actively participate. Third, the study indicated that parents largely believed that their role should be limited to home monitoring of school work. Fourth, parents expressed some confusion of expectations because the contact person with whom a rapport was developed prior to the conference was usually not in attendance during the IEP process. In light of the data, the authors concluded that further research is warranted.

Parent/School Partnerships

While national parental attendance at exceptional education planning conferences has been estimated at 75%, the quality of parent participation during the IEP conference leaves much to be desired. Delineating the rights and responsibilities of parents, Morgan and Myette (1984) emphasize the critical importance of parent/school partnerships. Given the numerous misconceptions of the past, the authors maintain that open communication between parents and school is vital to team efficacy in effecting productive educational goals and objectives for exceptional students. Admonishing educators to take stock of current policies relative to parent/professional collaboration, Morgan and Myette admonish the educational community to make a concerted effort by adopting programs and instituting procedures to address the issue of parent involvement in the IEP process --- the clear intent of the federal mandate (PL 94-142).

Deficient Parental Knowledge Base

Parent Perceptions of Inefficacy

Another important impactor is that of parental perception of inefficacy as it applies to the ability to convey quality information to their children regarding both the disability itself and subsequent placement determinations that have been effected during the IEP conference (Vaughn et al., 1988). Because students are often excluded from the conference configuration, they are frequently left adrift with regard to the decisions that potentially impact both their affective and academic postures. While school philosophy is holistic in nature, and all parties are encouraged to collaborate to effect productive educational outcomes, SLD resource students do not routinely attend IEP conferences.

Several considerations are involved. First, parents are often reluctant to "subject the child" to an uncomfortable situation. Often believing it to be in the best interest of the student to avoid all references to the disability, attending parents have often declined the opportunity to involve the child. Second, conferences are commonly held either before school or late in the afternoon to accommodate working parents. Because most students are dependent upon bus transportation, they are usually not available at the time of the conference. Third, professionals often resist the idea of student participation because of time constraints. While most are more than willing to meet with parents during non-school hours, every effort is made to conserve time in order to prioritize effective goal development. Long explanations to parents and students at the time of the conference would clearly impede that goal.

Although students are certainly permitted to attend, the then current policy did not encourage student attendance at the IEP conference meeting. Thus, parent inefficacy may have been inadvertently cultivated by school personnel within the practicum setting in that parents were not provided with a viable knowledge base which would allow effective collaboration with team members during the generation of educational goals for their children. Furthermore, the knowledge deficiency apparently contributed to feelings of inadequacy when attempting to convey information to their children regarding conference generated decisions.

Parents Adrift During IEP Development

Lack of parent involvement, according to McKinney and Hocutt (1982) has been a subject of broad interest since the enactment of PL 94-142. Despite the intentions of the mandate that parents become full partners in the IEP process, neither professionals nor parents themselves have embraced the full participation ideology. Finding parental disinterest in the IEP process to be a major hindrance to the objectives of the federal mandate, the authors conducted a longitudinal study which comprised 36 parents of SLD students and 38 parents of basic education underachievers. Procedures involved both a questionnaire and a structured interview. Divided into two parts, the first portion of the questionnaire contained 20 activities, including five subscales, which were predicated upon information exchange, parent education training, program planning, educational programs, and program evaluation. The second part addressed parent involvement in the development of IEP programs, shared experience with other parents of mildly disabled students, aid in effecting the objectives and goals of the IEP, and membership in advocacy groups. For SLD parents, the objective was to determine both the extent of parent involvement and the degree of sustained knowledge about the events of the IEP conference.

Terminal data suggests that parental involvement was very low in both groups. However, in the case of parents of SLD students, the researchers were unable to determine the degree of participation in the IEP process. Moreover, of those parents who recollected having attended the conference, very few possessed a knowledge base that would have allowed them to be effective during the educational conference --- a situation that paralleled that of the practicum setting. Thus, the authors concluded that effective parent involvement could not take place because there was no clear understanding of the IEP process and its commensurate goals and objectives.

Establishing Criteria for Parent Involvement

According to PL 94-142, there is an expectation that parents are to be actively involved in the development of educational goals and objectives for their children. Nonetheless, Gilliam and Coleman

(1981) found that parents were clearly not participating as equals in IEP conferences. Concurring, Goldstein, Stickland, Turnbull, and Curry (1981) claim that parents, at best, have little credibility as contributing members of the IEP team. On the contrary, they are far more likely to adopt roles as information providers and receivers than to assume an active stance in contributing to the development of educational goals and objectives during the IEP conference.

Launching two studies which were intended to establish whether parent involvement was actually taking place and to determine the level of participation which was occurring during IEP conferences, Lynch and Stein (1982) selected 400 parents by random sample from district program rosters of which 328 agreed to participate. In addition, 106 participants were selected for a low income study. Cultural and linguistic differences were common place among the participants. Sixty-four questions in the participant's language choice were administered during a thirty minute period. Terminal data indicated that 71% of the parents maintained that they had been actively involved in the IEP process despite the fact that only 47% had contributed any input during the meeting. Thus, two questions for consideration emerged from the study which had a direct bearing on target school concerns regarding the role of parents during team collaboration to produce quality IEPs for SLD resource students. First, exactly what elements constitute the incidence of parent involvement? Second, is it possible to establish specific criteria for the purpose of determining the presence of active parental status during conference meetings?

Causes Reflected in the Literature Review

Cultural Factors

Cultural differences between family and school profiles also have the potential to discourage parental attendance and/or involvement during the IEP conference. Understanding the needs of parents is just as essential to IEP efficacy as is the need to be aware of student requirements. For example, a number of state adopted programs support the ideology that cultural differences should be taken into consideration by the IEP conference team to provide the incentive for parents to attend and/or participate. Although some schools in the practicum district are insensitive to cultural implications, the practicum school excels in this capacity. With a penchant for celebrating differences among peoples, school personnel are accustomed to addressing cultural differences when considering student objectives. Certainly no other situation is as indicative of that ideology than the IEP conference setting itself. In addition to providing for interaction in one's native language during the conference (when necessary), routine procedures provide for a thorough review of all facets of the individual culture as it pertains to the goals and objectives of the conference meeting. In this regard, the practicum setting continues to enjoy excellent relationships with peoples of different cultures.

Parent Advocacy

Although parental attendance is somewhat less of a problem than participation, one factor that often causes parents to decline the IEP conference invitation is that meetings are frequently scheduled during normal business hours and the conference setting is often intimidating and austere. Focusing on parent-professional partnerships in collaborative effort during the IEP process, Gress and Carroll (1985) speak to the goals and objectives of PL 94-142 with regard to parent involvement. While acknowledging the positive efforts of numerous school communities in establishing effective parent-professional partnerships, the authors found that some schools continue to overlook the critical need to develop the notion of parent advocacy. As a result, ineffective parent participation continues to be a problem.

Environmental Considerations

One situation that impacts the willingness of parents to attend conferences is the setting itself. According to Gress and Carroll (1985), too many education planning environments are clinical and uninviting; a description that reflects the atmosphere at the practicum school. Currently slated for complete renovation, the practicum facility is not one that is particularly conducive to interpersonal activities. Overcrowded conditions do not allow for either comfort or privacy. While renovation considerations are still pending, exceptional education teachers have attempted to compensate for the deficiency by greeting parents in the main office in a friendly, informal manner. The overture is intended to provide a positive orientation to an otherwise austere conference setting. Despite the compensation, however, school based personnel have consistently indicated concern about the impact of deficient environmental conditions on interpersonal relationships.

Parent Comfort With Limited Role

Because many parents who routinely attend IEP conferences are unaware of their federally mandated rights according to PL 94-142, they appear to be satisfied with a limited participative role. In a 1988 study, Vaughn et al. found that most parents asked few questions and made few responses during the educational conference. Completing observations on parents of 26 elementary school children who had been referred for possible staffing into an SLD program, the authors reported that most found it unnecessary to ask questions because they had been answered during the meeting. Although parents appeared to be comfortable in a passive mode, it was the authors' observation that the necessary knowledge base for effective parent participation was clearly lacking. As a result, there was considerable parental reluctance to interact with members of the multi-disciplinary team during the decision making process.

Misperception of Rights and Responsibilities

Apparently, parents consider their primary educational responsibility to be the reinforcement of classroom assignments. During the Vaughn et al. 1988 research, it was learned that approximately half of the parents involved in the study perceived their major responsibility to be that of aiding children with their homework. Thus, parents tend to experience anxiety because of feelings of inadequacy in that regard. In a prior study, Turnbull, Turnbull, and Wheat (1982) experienced similar findings. Having no resources to attain the skills required to perform the task, parents became extremely anxious about the prospect of home tutoring. Although it is true that practicum school parent perception of the rights and responsibilities accorded them under PL 94-142 is often inaccurate, it did not appear that parents viewed their responsibility level at the IEP conference in terms of reinforcement of classroom assignments. On the contrary, most practicum school parents of SLD resource students had a visible tendency to displace the responsibility for homework assignments to school personnel.

Summary

Over the past fifteen years, an abundance of literature has presented to address the issue of parent participation in the development of the IEP --- a right accorded under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). As a result, schools throughout the nation have initiated numerous parent advocacy programs and other interventions to enlist full parent participation in constructing educational goals for their children. While the national average indicates that approximately 75% of IEP conferences are currently attended by at least one parent, the quality and level of parent participation in the decision making process remains extraordinarily low. Clearly, a consensus exists among all vested parties that full parent participation is critical to the overall development of an IEP which, in all respects, is expected to reflect the needs and interests of the individual child.

During the literature review of the problem and relevant causes, a number of interrelated factors emerged. First, the maximization of parent potential in the IEP decision-making process is critical to effecting successful outcomes for exceptional students. Second, more research is needed to determine the types and degree of parent involvement that is required in order to best serve their interests. Third, a collaborative effort among members of multi-disciplinary teams is essential to effective IEP development. Fourth, authors generally agree that the necessary knowledge base for effective participation during IEP conferences is substantially lacking in many parents of exceptional education students. Fifth, although some schools have developed programs to facilitate effective parent involvement in the IEP process, many have ignored the responsibility of educating parents with regard to their rights and responsibilities as indicated by PL 94-142.

That lack of parent attendance or effective participation in the IEP process is a problem of national consequence is a foregone conclusion. As the educational community moves toward an era of reform, the problem assumes even greater significance. In concert with the mainstreaming policies of the Regular Education Initiative (Will, 1986), parent involvement is intended to play a critical role in addressing the global needs of learning disabled students. As mildly handicapped students move back into the basic education setting, the marriage between educators and parents will assume a position of greater significance than ever before. More than at any other time in American history, parents will be expected to collaborate with team professionals in developing a viable education plan for their children. In light of the significance that has been attached to the team concept, it is incumbent upon educational professionals to adopt ideologies and methodologies that hold high potential to facilitate the productive participation of parents during the decision-making process that is associated with IEP development.

CHAPTER III

Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

The following goals and objectives were projected for this practicum.

Goals and Expectations

In accord with a target school philosophy that is predicated upon prioritizing parent involvement in the educational environment, the primary objective of the writer is to devise a program that has the potential to substantially increase parent attendance at IEP conferences and encourage active participation during the development of differentiated educational goals and objectives in relation to the individual student. bEcause quality parent involvement is critical to the maximization of student potential, several considered goals have been chosen to underlie the practicum effort.

Behavioral Objectives

1. At the end of the four month project, a 10% increase in the current parent attendance rate at IEP conferences will be demonstrated by the practicum participants. Measurement will be

effected by writer scrutiny of Guidance Department records of the audit files to ascertain the number of target parents who

2. At the end of the four month project, a 20% increase in active parent participation in the decision-making process during the IEP conference will be demonstrated by attending members of the target group. Measurement will be effected by a school-based observational instrument which will be recorded by the attending SLD resource teacher for each attending parent in three categories: information-provision response, decision-making response, and non-response.

3. At the end of the four month project, a 20% increase will be demonstrated by the target group in parent perception of the importance of the IEP process itself and of parent participation as full and equal partners in the collaborative endeavor to enhance student success in educational pursuits. Measurement will be effected by a writer generated questionnaire which will be completed by the target parents.

Measurement of Objectives

Audit File Review

In order to adequately address the first objective, it was determined that a comprehensive review of all SLD resource audit files which pertained to practicum participants should be undertaken to determine the difference between the baseline incidence of parent attendance at the IEP conference and the terminal incidence of parent attendance at the conference. This method was selected because of its value in determining terminal data which could then be compared with the baseline data which was obtained on November 4, 1991. Thus, it was possible to obtain a differential in performance between pre-implementation and post-implementation periods.

Teacher Observation Instrument

Because of the behavioral orientation of the second objective, the Quality Circle authorized and participated in the design of a school-based observational instrument for teachers to record both the type and incidence of parent participation during the IEP conference. Distributed to exceptional education teachers on November 5, 1991, the instrument was used to obtain baseline data. The instrument was selected because it allowed an expedient method of recording in which the expertise of exceptional education teachers could be utilized to gain quality data. In as much, any changes in performance between the baseline conference and the terminal conference could be ascertained.

Parent Questionnaire

A school designed Parent Questionnaire was mailed to the 90 practicum participants on November 5, 1991 to obtain baseline data regarding parent perceptions of their own roles and responsibilities in the IEP developmental process. The instrument was designed to obtain specific information regarding the underlying reasons for nonattendance and/or nonparticipation. Having obtained baseline perceptions, the instrument provided a basis for comparison between parent perceptions prior to the practicum intervention and once again upon completion of the intervention.

CHAPTER IV

Solution Strategy

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The existing problem in the practicum setting was that a substantial number of junior high school parents of SLD resource students, who should be actively engaged in the planning of their childrens' IEPs, were either declining to attend IEP conferences or were failing to assume a participative role during the planning stages of the IEP, causing the full intent of PL 94-142 not be realized. To address the problem, the writer undertook an extensive review of the literature in order to create an infrastructure from which a solution strategy could be realized. Notwithstanding the fact that parent involvement in a wide variety of school activities had already become a "way of life" at the school in which the practicum took place, the type of involvement was largely limited to participation in social activities and clerical duties. Although numerous overtures had been made by administration to effect parent involvement in all aspects of the educational orientation, parent response was primarily confined to non-academic areas.

Appearing to be more comfortable in roles that were associated with adjunct activities (i.e., fund raisers, committee work, chaperons for dances and sports events, and clerical duties), parents tended to avoid areas that involved working directly with educators in the performance of classroom functions.

While a number of parents of SLD-resource students had also been active in school social activities, the problem of parent non-attendance and non-participation in IEP conferences continued to plague educators in the practicum setting. Despite numerous interventions over the previous year, minimal improvement had been achieved. Thus, the practicum effort was intended to address this deficiency.

Collaboration Through Teaming

In light of national attention to the problems within the educational infrastructure, educational reform appears to offer an alternative to mediocrity. In response to public outcry, the ills of exceptional education were addressed by Assistant Secretary of Education, Madeleine Will, in 1986. Although still highly controversial, the ideology underlying the Regular Education Initiative (REI) has gained momentum and many states have implemented programs to enhance educational opportunity for exceptional students. Based on the concept of shared responsibility, REI proponents maintain that mildly handicapped students will benefit by their return to the mainstream when support services continue to be rendered by exceptional education teachers. Conceptually based on the PL 94-142 "least restrictive environment" objective, regular classroom and exceptional education teachers would team to provide a holistically based learning environment for all students. According to Will, the pooling of resources through collaborative effort has the potential to address the differentiated needs and best interests of all who comprise the learning environment. A global approach to education, it calls for the development of school-parent programs which would enhance both the incidence and quality of parent participation in all aspects of student education.

According to Naisbitt (1986), the ultimate success of any reform movement is actually contingent upon the ability of groups of people to initiate a self-help creed which acts as a platform for human endeavor. Maintaining that the demise of American confidence in its institutions was caused by a succession of corporate failures, in conjunction with societal divisiveness over the Viet Nam war, the author suggests that self-help movements actually provide the impetus for reform. Defining self-help to be a critical solution strategy among persons who share a conceptual base, Naisbitt claims that the self-help concept is actually responsible for the proliferation of American entrepreneurs. Moreover, teaming has become the preferred method of fueling organizations, and it is the author's view that with the combined effort of self-help parental movements and the teaming configuration, the public school system may yet be salvaged.

Clearly, Naisbitt's concepts parallel both the philosophy within the practicum setting itself and the federal mandate that has defined the specific objectives which lie at the heart of exceptional education. Thus, it would appear that, when the appropriate solution strategy surfaces to entice parents of SLD resource students to assume responsible roles by participating in the IEP process, then the full intent of the federal mandate to provide relevant educational student goals and objectives can finally be realized.

Perhaps no other domain so clearly advocates collaborative effort as a solution strategy to inefficacy than that of the nation's business community. Overwhelmed with problems that have resulted in a diminished position in world markets, business has been forced to brainstorm new ideas in order to cope with the challenge to regain its global position. To address the situation, a major paradigm shift has been effected. In approaching the need to dispel the connotation connected with the top down management concept, many of the country's largest corporations have opted for a paradigm shift. For example, Texas Instrument has recently undertaken a program which reduces management control and emphasizes team structure. According to CEO Jerry Junkins, "no matter what your business is, these teams are the wave of the future (p. 52)." High performance units, they are responsible for the total undertaking of producing quality products within certain time and budget constraints. However, Texas Instrument is just one of many that have reaped the enormous benefits of collaborative effort through teaming. Federal Express, General Mills, 3M, Aetna Life and Casualty, and Johnsonville Foods are just a few or the other major corporations that have alluded to the teaming effort (Dumaine, 1990).

Effective collaboration, according to Hoerr (1989) depends on the revamping of job applications with the express purpose directed toward making them challenging. When workers feel ownership in the production effort and have interesting work that is decision-based, the quality of the product is greatly enhanced. Consisting of a variety of orientations, many teams are educated to address everything from problem-solving, to self-purpose, to self-managing. Whatever the goal, according to the Hoerr, collaboration is apparently the solution strategy that will guide the nation during the next decade. Despite an apparent concern that the movement is not gaining momentum as rapidly as the country needs it, the author is convinced that the effects of quality team work is essential to the overall success of any institution or enterprise.

However, not all managers agree that empowering the work force by creating individual, self-managed teams is the universal remedy for declining profits and low productivity. Klein (1989) contends that highly successful Japanese companies create incentives for employees through suggestion programs rather than by employing the teaming concept. Although the author supports the view that employees must be involved in business enterprise, the idea of employee autonomy is viewed as a dangerous element to the overall goals of business enterprise. As an example, Klein discussed a ten year experience with an engine company that had opted for a autonomous team approach to offset declining worker morale. During a period in which the company was showing a healthy profit, the teams appeared to work effectively toward quality control. However, with the onset of the oil embargo, manufacturing costs had to be reduced. When management responded by incorporating new strategies to offset declining profits, the teams rebelled. Therefore, Klein recommends certain strategies (i.e., cross-teaming) which concentrate on cooperative effort rather than autonomy.

From a limited autonomy perspective, Solomon (1991) points to the productive experience of a General Motors subsidiary, Saturn Corp., which has entered into the teaming concept in order to gain a more competitive position in the small car market. Two teaming constructs are involved. First, management teams with union representatives to effect business decisions. Second, semi-autonomous work teams underlie the teaming effort. Heavily invested in its mission statement, GM has fostered the notion of collaboration through comprehensive educational programs to orient workers to the new company philosophy. Quoting Saturn's vice president, Timothy Epps, Solomon states that "the primary goal is to create a culture in which employees accept ownership for the direct labor functions they perform (p. 72)." Although the automobile manufacturing concern is totally committed to the teaming concept, management is by no means undermined. While the teams are fully responsible for individual job specifications and a direct conduit exists between workers and management, team autonomy is limited to those areas in which workers have a particular expertise. As a result, GM views the two-fold teaming concept as a positive restructuring effort.

Employee Award Programs

In another approach to employee involvement (Hyatt, 1991) emphasized the merits of rewarding employees for presenting ideas that would increase productivity, improve working conditions, foster employee-management harmony, or devising new tools. Reporting on United Electric Controls Co. which produced the greatest loss in its 60 year history in 1987, the article lauds its chairman for having had the insight to revamp management procedures by involving employees through an award program. Accordingly, the previously disenchanted workers were buoyed by the inclusion of their ideas in the overall format and were motivated to produce tools to do the job more efficiently. As a result, quality productivity with fewer workers is taking place, and profits are apparently soaring again.

Concurring, Gunsch (1991) maintains that countless companies all around the country have recognized award programs as a solution strategy for low motivation. United Electric Controls Co. of Massachusetts faced a myriad of problems which included excess inventories and diminished profits. Desperately in need of an intervention to save the company, it opted for an employee incentive program which encouraged workers to become actively involved in problem solving by creating a "suggestion program." Regardless of its value, each time a suggestion was implemented, the donor-employee received 100 dollars. As a result, employee motivation was increased dramatically, and the company enjoyed increased profits.

Quality Circles

Potentializing human resources was the goal of the Miller Brewing Company as it underwent a major revamping of managerial policy. To address the company's needs, it was decided that a Quality Circle process would be implemented and referred to as "Employee Involvement Teams." According to Schumer (1988), the underlying ideology is evolutionary in concept and is predicated on the notion that it "is simply the idea of treating employees in a responsible, dignified manner (p. 564)". At Miller, employees are strongly encouraged to become participants in community activities for the purpose of linking business involvement to the broader spectrum of societal involvement. Considered a process, rather than a program, its intent is to encourage employees to be their best by creating an atmosphere of mutual respect through the intertwining of employee Quality Circles and Participative Management. Although there is no undermining of managerial control, the company has moved toward a position in which free and open dialogue between employees and management has become part of the daily process. Each employee is expected to commit to the company's standard of quality by collaborating with one another through a teaming effort. Thus, Schumer believes that the Quality Circle strategy is the primary function of the construct.

In testimony to the merits of employee involvement, a recent survey of the Fortune 1000 managers by the University of Southern California indicated that 70% favored policies that involved employees because of declining quality and productivity within American corporations. Although the notion of employee involvement was not particularly attractive to managers, it was the competition of the 1980s that spurred business toward solutions that would ultimately give them the competitive edge. Maintaining that programs that ascribe to strong employee involvement increase quality, productivity, and profits, most managers perceive them to be a long term strategy ("Employees," 1990).

Business-School Partnerships

Although the ASCD acknowledges the importance of business participation in the educational construct within the nation's public school system, its position is tentative with regard to the scope and depth of involvement. Concerned with the potential impact on student achievement, the organization warns of the potential hazards when the goals of business and education are conflicting. Recommending that business-school partnerships undergo severe scrutiny to assure the fact that goals are compatible with those of the ASCD, the organization delineated certain ground rules which should underlie the proposed partnership. Foremost among them is the preservation of educational values, goals, and objectives. In addition, it is maintained that shareholders in the partnership should be cognizant of maintaining the integrity of the curriculum, seeking opportunities to allow for input from diverse factions, assuring that business based materials are bias free, and providing for interim evaluations of the overall goals and objectives of the partnership (ASCD Task Force, 1990).

Despite reservations that usually surface when two different domains merge to coalesce, collaboration through teaming has clearly taken center stage as the preferred strategy of the 90s. In an effort to mediate the problem of skill deficiency among persons who comprise the work force, more than two thirds of 130 major corporations have prioritized public education in a list of corporate concerns. But, according to Mac Dowell (1989), partnerships may not be worth the investment in the long run. Alluding to the Boston Compact, one of the nation's most ambitious and expensive drop-out-programs, the dismal results were sobering. Having exhausted 15 million dollars in a project that included the provision of a wide variety of supportive services for students, the school-business partnership was to learn that 43 percent of all 9th grade students in Boston continued to drop out. Citing both a too broadly defined scope and top-down management as the prime culprits in the endeavor, the author maintains that 15 million dollars could have been spent far more effectively to improve schools by targeting more specific areas that present a high potential for relevancy to business interventions.

Direct Intervention by Business

Still another business intervention is gaining momentum as it becomes increasingly difficult for schools to comply with the public demand for school improvement through restructuring. As severe budget constraints force higher student-teacher ratios and the reduction of student services, educators find it necessary to seek outside resources. As a result, companies are beginning to market their wares to school systems. For example, one well known private company with a history in educational services, under a five year contract agreement with one of the nation's larger counties, is slated to take total responsibility for operations of a newly constructed elementary school. Predicated upon a non-traditional learning environment, the program emphasizes reduced class sizes, parent involvement, and individualized classroom orientation. No grades are administered in the integrated environment which is comprised of students ranging from gifted to learning disabled. The underlying strategy is directed toward the empowerment of children during the educational process. The five year project is expected to determine the merits of alternative methods as they apply to an ethnically diverse population.

Education and Parent-Teacher Teams

Acknowledging the concerns of educators, parents, and the business community, School Improvement Committees throughout the nation are providing a foundation for educational restructuring. Heavily focused on universal involvement, these national and state inspired teams are comprised of teachers and administrators, students, parents, members of the business community, union representatives, and classified workers in the field of education. Responsible for establishing goals and implementing programs to improve all aspects of school functioning, the multi-disciplinary teams operate within specified criteria and a stipulated budget. Perceiving parent involvement to be a critical element to achieving team sponsored educational goals, the practicum school has moved toward its educational objectives with a clear vision of the importance of the role of teacher-parent collaboration within the educational setting.

As if to reinforce the perspective of these recently adopted school constructs, increasing numbers of newspaper articles and letters have emerged to address the growing concern within the practicum community that the interests of children are being undermined by parent apathy --- a condition that was recently highlighted by a less than 50% attendance rate at a highly publicized Parent Night at an elementary school within the practicum district.

Numerous strategies have surfaced in the educational community to involve parents in the educational goals of their children. Aside from a myriad of school based interventions, state sponsored programs have been devised and implemented to encourage family participation through training and special activities. Spurring parent interest, these campaigns are intended to foster the idea that parents are a critical element to the realization of successful educational outcomes for children. Involving parents in school activities, the programs tend to boost parent morale and provide them with a sense of belonging in the day to day operations of the school community setting.

Clearly, a consensus exists among educators with an expertise in the area of at-risk youth that parent involvement is absolutely essential in providing effective interventions for the purpose of avoiding the possibility of high school drop outs. Generally conceding that parents genuinely care about the educations of their children, many educators recommend capitalizing on parent strengths in order to foster their involvement. For example, utilizing the natural interest and talents of parents within the school setting provides a basis for mutual respect which can then be directed toward the enhancement of student objectives.

Exceptional Education and Parent Partnerships

One of the most significant organizations to support the field of exceptional education in the practicum district is a state sponsored system. Offering a wide variety of services to handicapped children, exceptional educators, and parents, the system assumes an advocacy position for parent involvement. Within the last few years, the organization applied for and received a grant to foster parent-teacher partnerships which could be coordinated with other school based programs. Consisting of several modules which included a mentor program, peer tutoring, parent conferencing skills, responsibility training, and a Handicap Awareness Simulation Workshop, the program provided teachers and parents with opportunities to collaborate in the best interests of students. Piloted at both an elementary and junior high school in the district where the practicum was implemented, the program was geared to effectively recruit parents for participation in a wide variety of activities relative to exceptional students. Although no terminal documentation was available at this writing, participating educators were highly optimistic regarding the outcome.

Although Morgan (1982) indicates that limited data are available regarding the extent of overall parental participation, "the message is clear: Not only are all parents of handicapped children to be given an opportunity to participate, but they should participate as full and equal partners in the process, every bit as knowledgeable, skilled and articulate as school personnel (p. 37)." Although it is unclear as to exactly what constitutes parent involvement, the author suggests two precepts for guiding school policy relative to parent participation in the IEP conference. First, parents should be afforded the opportunity of contributing to the full extent of their comfort level. Second, parents should be encouraged by schools to attend and participate in IEP conferences rather than to be charged with the obligation for same. In a later publication, Morgan and Myette (1984) address parent rights and responsibilities in a comprehensive outline that is geared to provide information to parents regarding both their legal rights and responsibilities as defined by PL 94-142.

In accord with Morgan's contention that some latitude should exist in evaluating the extent of parent participation during the IEP conference, Lynch and Stein (1982) express the view that parent involvement cannot be categorized into specific criteria because of the diverse backgrounds and views of the individuals involved. Rather, the authors suggest, the same individualization that is integral to IEP development might be used as a basis for determining parent participation, and individual parent comfort levels could then be used as the barometer for determining the extent of parent involvement instead of relying upon check lists that categorize numbers and types of comments.

Following a study which involved the observation of 26 IEP conferences in which parents participated in varying degrees, Vaughn et al. (1988) concluded that the time has come to consider placing less emphasis on parent training programs and more on involving parents and students in the IEP process. Advocating involvement at a level that addresses the goals and objectives of PL 94-142, the author admonishes educators to seek methods that would involve parents without compromising their individual comfort levels. Perceiving that many parents were satisfied with a "low level" participative roles during the study, the authors claim that professional teams should take into consideration the differentiated needs of both parents and students during the IEP process. Agreeing with the Lynch and Stein (1982) and Morgan (1982) positions, the authors maintain that the potential exists to create educational goals that are commensurate with the needs of the students involved.

Exceptional Education and Training Programs

In a study conducted by McKinney and Hocutt (1982), the purpose was to ascertain the difference in the quality and scope of parent involvement among 36 parents of learning disabled students and 38 parents of average students within the mainstream setting. Findings indicated that there were virtually no differences between groups relative to parent participation in either quality or scope except where the IEP process was concerned. In that area, the authors found that parents wanted to be involved but lacked the knowledge base to assume participative positions during IEP development. Thus, McKinney and Hocutt suggest that training parents to understand their legal rights and responsibilities, providing a knowledge base regarding the mechanics and goals of the IEP, and fostering a greater understanding of the significance of parent participation during IEP development offers potential as a solution strategy to parent failure to participate in the IEP process.

Exceptional Education Pre-Conference and Conference Strategies to Aid Parents

Yoshida (1982), in response to parent inefficacy during IEP conferences, proposed a number of steps to be incorporated as an integral part of a research program. Because parents are literally bombarded with enormous amounts of legalistic language and information for which a knowledge base is essential, the author has designated the following three areas for special consideration in effectively communicating with parents. First, educators should make a point of asking questions that would allow them to know exactly what the individual parent would like to learn from the conference meetings. Second, school personnel should be sensitive to the parent's inexperience with school-based terminology and make every effort to clearly explain goals and expectations in lay terms. Third, where school resources are limited, parent groups could be trained to facilitate parent involvement through parent education programs and to act as a monitoring agent for school programs.

In accord with the 1982 Yoshida position, Mac Millan (1988) outlines a solution strategy for gaining higher quality parent participation in the IEP process by undertaking certain procedures prior to and during the conference meeting. For example, a pre-conference telephone conversation could be used to establish rapport with the parent and provide a comprehensive view of what will transpire during the conference itself. In addition, the author recommends that conference reports be provided to the parent in advance to allow a private period in which to cope with the emotions that often accompany the experience. Following the delivery of the report, Mac Millan recommends that an additional telephone contact be made to clarify report terminology and answer remaining questions.

During the IEP meeting, the author suggests the following constructs and overtures: the contact teacher should sit with the parent; clarification should be provided whenever the parent appears to be confused; specific details regarding the rationale for the development of the individualized IEP should be given to the parent; positive comments should be used to offset any negative that may have been introduced by professionals during the meeting; and all expectation should be conveyed at the conference setting. Immediately following the conference, the contact teacher should bring closure through an informal conversation with the parent in which the notion of continued concern for the welfare of the student and the desire to collaborate with the parent on an ongoing basis is conveyed. Having successfully addressed the three areas relevant to the conference setting, it is the author's view that effective continued parent participation will be realized and the students best interests will have been appropriately addressed.

In concert with Yoshida (1982) and Mac Millan (1988) ideology, Green (1988) presents a similar solution for increased parent participation in the IEP conference. Acknowledging the importance of a strong parent-school communication base, the author delineates a five step process. First, parents should be encouraged to prepare a list of questions prior to the meeting and to note additional concerns as they present throughout the process. Second, parents could be asked to consider long and short term goals for the child. Three, parents would be a valuable resource if invited to aid the other members of the committee by informing them of the child's habits at home. Four, the expertise of parents with regard to the child should be valued and student information regarding effective home motivators and preferred response modes should be sought. Five, the parent should be provided with specific information regarding the goals and expectations that have been set forth in the IEP. According to the author, the concept is based on the creation of a situation in which the sharing of collective knowledge will produce the most efficient means of serving the child.

Still another solution was presented by Nye, Westling, and Laten (1986) which addresses the collaborative effort of parents and educators. Based on improved communication skills, the La Grange Area Department of Special Education in Illinois conducted two eight week courses to prepare parents for active participation during IEP conferences. The first program was designed to teach parents to ask "cue questions" during a pre-conference telephone conversation that would provide them with pertinent information regarding the construct and format of the upcoming IEP meeting. The second course was programmed to teach parents effective and appropriate methods of asking for clarification of information which was received during the conference without the risk of the parent experiencing embarrassment or feeling inferior.

Exceptional Education and Communication Strategies

In accord with the Yoshida (1982), Mac Millan (1988), and Green (1988) stances that effective communication is essential in producing quality parent participation, Davis (1989) reports on a highly successful parent involvement program that was implemented by the Emerson School in Rosemead, California. Faced with a mandate to increase parent involvement at a time when parents are facing enormous socio-economic demands that greatly reduce their availability to participate in school oriented activities, Emerson School decided to meet the challenge by devising a program to communicate with parents in a variety of modes.

For instance, 42 award ribbons are currently presented to the Student of the Week from each classroom, and a follow-up call is made to the parents to share the good news. Each teacher is expected to make 7 to 14 positive calls to each parent during the grading period. Another method that has been adopted by the school in order to encourage and maintain home-school relationships is consistent mailing of thank-you notes whenever a parent or student does something to deserve it. By maintaining the communication base, it allows teachers to learn the area of expertise of parents and to provide the encouragement to put the respective talents to work within the school setting. Highly successful, according to Davis, the plan is expected to be adopted by other school systems.

Exceptional Education and Environmental Strategies

In delineating a plan to encompass a number of strategic interventions and environmental considerations, Gress and Carrol (1985) challenge school systems to adopt programs which are inclined to motivate parents to become productive members of the IEP multi-disciplinary team. Focusing on parent comfort, the authors specify ten areas of concentration have been established to encourage parent attendance and participation during the IEP process. First, provide for the needs of parents by accommodating to parent work schedules. Second, conduct some conferences in off-campus locations (i.e., community library). Third, provide a "red-carpet" welcome. Fourth, create a waiting area with amenities. Fifth, enhance communication during the conference by devising a seating configuration that denotes equality. Sixth, conduct an adult forum in which knowledge and shared ideas are readily exchanged. Seventh, strive for full parent involvement through consensus at the IEP conference. Eighth, furnish multi-opportunities for parents to provide input during the meeting. Ninth, Individualize to adjust for parent learning (communication) styles. Tenth, connect parents with support groups.

In summary, the authors view parent-professional partnerships as a critical factor in the overall development of the educational plan. Emphasizing the importance of providing incentives for parents to become fully participative, the authors suggest that students will ultimately become the beneficiaries of strategically formulated IEPs.

Exceptional Education and Interdisciplinary Teams

Finding professional participation to be extremely limited, Scanlon et al. (1985), discovered that it was not uncommon for the IEP conference committee to consist of only the parent and the exceptional education teacher. Emphasizing the critical importance of the regular classroom teacher, the authors contend that "without the regular classroom teacher's participation in development of the IEP, it would appear that the handicapped child has a low probability of being mainstreamed effectively (p. 374)." Therefore, the authors admonish schools to create interdisciplinary teams to administer to the needs and best interests of handicapped children by establishing professional teams which include all vested parties. It is this configuration, according to Scanlon et al. that has the highest potential to encourage both attendance and productive participation of parents during the development of conference goals and objectives.

Exceptional Education and Parent Counseling

Humes (1986) supports the idea of parent counseling to encourage parent involvement. Describing a program that was implemented in a small, suburban area, the author maintains that it has achieved a sustained success rate in the community. The program, called Peer Assisters, is predicated upon the concept that trained volunteers can be influential in facilitating the understanding of parents with regard to the IEP process. Funding for the program was supplied by the superintendent of schools within the area. Operating solely on parent request, the trained assisters communicate within the construct of a one-on-one format. Although local parent groups were responsible for the creation of this program, the author contends that school counselors can be highly instrumental in organizing parent assister groups to operate within elementary and middle school configurations. According to the author, counselors are in an excellent position to assume leadership roles and provide parent training. Thus, there is high potential to effect productive parent participation in the developmental process of the IEP.

Exceptional Education and Teacher Training

In another approach to activating parents during IEP process development, Hughes and Ruhl (1987) conducted a nationwide survey of 1,418 teachers to determine the type and scope of parent-teacher interactions. With approximately two thirds of the teachers reporting, it was learned that teachers engage in a wide variety of communication strategies. As a result, the authors propose that training teachers in appropriate techniques has the potential to enhance parent participation in the IEP conference. Hughes and Ruhl recommend that specific areas of concentration be included in the training format: training programs to accurately convey information in lay terms and to fully explain test scores in simple terms; inservice in varied communication strategies; parent-teacher conferencing orientation; training in teacher directed home-school cooperative agreements in which parents become tutors; and training in the use of parent groups to realize full collaboration in pursuit of educational goals.

Parent Involvement Within the Practicum District

Despite a myriad of programs which have been instituted to encourage parent participation in the IEP process, the practicum district has met with mixed reviews. Unfortunately, no hard data exist regarding either district level parent attendance rates or the quality of parent participation during IEP development. Nonetheless, a consensus exists that both areas of parent involvement leave much to be desired. To ameliorate the situation, several pilot programs have been undertaken.

School A

For example, School A implemented Roger Kroth's Theoretical Mirror Model of Parent Involvement for which a grant was obtained by a local support organization. Operating as a "Mentor Program", the school coalesced with a local community college to create an infusion of services and the provision of mentors from the business sector. Relevant field trips were organized, and students met with mentors a minimum of eight times over a three month period. A drop out prevention program, the primary goal was to provide at-risk students with a personal mentor and role model.

Moreover, parent inservices were conducted in order to provide a knowledge base regarding handicapping conditions and to encourage parent involvement by establishing a rationale for the desired partnership between school and home. With the exception of time, which was contributed by each mentor in dealing with the assigned student, School A assumed total responsibility for the scheduling of events, the provision of adjunct services, and the development of activities.

Although no hard data are available at this writing, school personnel support the continuation of the program with some substantial modifications. First, it was determined that field trips held little relevancy for the at-risk student. Second, although mentors were viewed as a valuable and integral resource to the program, the recommendation was made that better screening procedures should be designed to ensure that the prospective mentors are fully committed to program objectives and goals. Moreover, it was determined that the original three month time frame for the pilot project was insufficient, and a further recommendation was made to implement the program at the beginning of the school year in order to allow for rapport development between mentor and student.

School B

School B adopted a parent component which was integrated within the general school format. Operating under school-based guidelines, eight workshops were conducted to increase parent-teacher awareness of the benefits connected with parent involvement in the IEP process. Funded by private enterprise, workshop participants were exposed to a variety of strategies that were designed to help parents and teachers to guide students in adopting positive behavior patterns and to be more effective during parent conferencing in order to effect a parent-teacher partnership. Furthermore, a rationale was developed to encourage greater parent participation during the IEP process. Although there are no hard data available, it was determined that the program would be discontinued upon termination of the pilot program. Apparently, it was the perception of school administrators and teachers that both parents and teachers had failed to generalize the skills that were learned during the workshop experiences.

School C

School C implemented a school-based pilot program that was comprised of a series of three inservices for parents over a three month period. The goal was to educate parents to the IEP process and create a rationale to encourage sustained attendance and participation. Based on a question-answer format, exceptional education teachers and guidance counselors conducted the inservices. Following the second session, the attempt was aborted because of low overall attendance and lack of participation by attending parents. Upon reflection, school personnel determined that more incentive should have been provided for parents to attend and that it was naive to assume that attending parents were capable of constructing valid questions without at least an elementary knowledge base.

Despite some notable outcomes from the pilot programs, none of the practicum district orientations provided concrete terminal information. Furthermore, none substantiated an increase in either parent attendance or performance during the IEP conference meeting. While School A produced noteworthy recommendations, there was no evidence of improvement in parent attendance during the IEP process. Apparently, School B realized insufficient results to warrant continuation of the program, and School C aborted on the basis of insufficient attendance at scheduled inservices.

Summary of Literature and District Based Solutions

A number of solution strategies have surfaced from both the literature and from three practicum district pilot programs. A variety of approaches emerged from both the business sector and the educational arena. For example, collaboration through the teaming concept was presented by Dumaine (1990), Hoerr (1989), Klein (1989) and Solomon (1991). Award programs were discussed by Gunsch (1991) and Hyatt, (1991). Teaming under the construct of the "Quality Circle" was introduced by Schumer (1988) and appeared in "Employees" (1990). MacDowell (1989) supported the idea of school-business partnerships, while Morgan (1982), Lynch and Stein (1982), and Vaughn et al. (1988) concentrated on strategies to ensure a parent equity position within the IEP team context.

McKinney and Hocutt (1982) maintained that parent training programs are a viable solution to parent apathy, and Gress and Carrol (1985) and Davis (1986) viewed communication strategies as the panacea. Moreover, Scanlon et al. (1981) emphasized the importance of the regular classroom teacher as a fully participating member of the IEP conference team, and Humes (1986) introduced the concept of parent training for the purpose of aiding their peers in becoming productive members of the IEP conference team. Hughes and Ruhl (1987) presented the notion that teachers should be trained to facilitate parent productivity in the developmental stages of their childrens' IEP. Finally, three schools within the practicum district introduced pilot programs which were oriented toward parent involvement in drop-out prevention programs and productive participation in IEP development.

Discussion and Evaluation of Solution Strategies

Business Strategies

Numerous solution strategies to address the problem of parent apathy with regard to the IEP process were presented in the literature review. Clearly, the art of collaboration is currently a highly regarded technique in effecting human motivation. Thus, a wide variety of techniques have surfaced during the past decade to address both the requirement of the business sector to gain access to a skilled labor force and the need of public education to cope with societal pressure to produce high school graduates with skills that are commensurate with the job descriptions within an information-based society.

On the threshold of massive restructuring, at a time when budget constraints are at a maximum, it is clearly incumbent upon the educational community to exercise every option and to employ all available resources to ensure the inclusion of parents and all other stakeholders in the educational endeavor. Although the practicum school was fully invested in this ideology and parents were becoming increasingly active throughout the past three years, the problem of parent attendance and participation in IEP development persisted. In reflecting upon the solution strategies presented in the review, many were relevant to the practicum setting.

Teaming

From the business sector, Dumaine (1990), Hoerr (1989), Klein (1989), and Solomon (1991) embrace the popular philosophy that collaboration through teaming is a productive solution to worker apathy. While Klein and Solomon express some reservations as to the extent of autonomy that should be conferred upon teams, they are fully invested in the concept as well. Although totally committed to the collaborative effort, like Klein and Solomon, the writer's natural inclination was to limit those areas of decision making to the levels of expertise of the individuals involved. Therefore, the primary objective of the practicum effort was to devise strategies that would ultimately provide a parental knowledge base which would allow for the development of a level of expertise that would make full parent participation a viable situation.

Incentive Programs

Award Programs have been adopted by a number of corporations to provided incentives for employees to become more involved and committed to company goals (Hyatt, 1991 and Gunsch, 1991). Encouraging employees to produce ideas and designs for more effective production, companies are awarding cash prizes and other incentives to increase productivity and quality. Although extrinsic reward may be relevant to the materialistic concepts of business, it is the writer's opinion that the technique was inappropriate for the intrinsically based objectives of the practicum project.

Teaming

In still another configuration, team concepts are presented through "Quality Circles" (Schumer, 1988 and "Employees," 1990). Interestingly enough, 70% of the Fortune 1000 corporations support the idea of employee involvement teams. In accord, the writer considers the "Quality Circle" to be an integral part of the monitoring system of collaborative effort. As such, it viewed as an important construct when devising the practicum program format.

Business-School Partnerships

Of late, business-school partnerships have taken center stage. Perhaps the most renown project of its kind is the 15 million dollar remote intervention known as the Boston Compact. Despite the massive monetary infusion, little progress was realized in the reduction of high school drop-outs --- a situation which caused Mac Dowell (1989) to comment that the business sector must reconsider the nature of investments within the public school system. Speculating that business will ultimately take more control of its resources in educational partnerships, Mac Dowell maintains that it is entitled to a fair return on its investment.

Private Enterprise in the Public School System

In still another approach, a major county within the practicum state has opted to contract with private enterprise to provide a direct intervention by delegating the entire management process of a new elementary school. However, the ASCD admonishes school administrators to be cognizant of the dangers of incompatible goals between educators and business managers and encourages vigilance in assuring that educational objectives are prioritized. Although the writer is convinced of the merits of educational-business mergers within appropriate guidelines, the construct held little relevancy to the practicum project with the exception that human resources within the business sector might be employed as part of the monitoring procedure of the "Quality Circle."

Educational Strategies

As well as paralleling the philosophy of the practicum school, the state agenda certainly addresses the global restructuring requirements of education. As such, its precepts and format currently play an important role in the practicum project as it relates to the SIC, a committee with which all school-based projects ultimately interconnect.

Morgan (1982), Lynch and Stein (1982), and Vaughn et al. (1988) fully support the view that, under PL 94-142, parents are entitled to an equal partnership with professionals during the development of their child's IEP. However, it is the authors' contention that individualization in criteria for IEP conference participation should exist, not only because of the differentiated needs of students but, because of the differentiation among parents. While the writer agrees that professionals must take differences among parents into consideration during the IEP process, a floating criteria base would appear to be far too subjective for the purpose of this project. Nonetheless, the ideology connected with addressing differentiated needs is totally compatible with the philosophy which exists within the practicum setting and, as such, was incorporated as part of the practicum solution orientation.

Another posture was taken by McKinney and Hocutt (1982) relevant to parent training programs. Although the writer aspired to the incorporation of parent training within the practicum project format, strong reservations existed with regard to its effectiveness in an isolated context. For example, School C found the overture to be far too limited to produce an effective outcome. However, in concert with other components such as the pre-conferencing and conferencing strategies that are proposed by Yoshida (1982), Mac Millan (1988), Gruen (1988), and Nye et al. (1986), the parent training concept held high potential for project incorporation.

Another viable approach to encouraging parent involvement was proposed by Davis (1986) and Gress and Carrol (1985). Communication based, the strategies deal with achieving effective working relationships with parents by using frequent, relevant communication techniques to enlist parent interest in educational objectives. In complete accord with the authors' position that effective communication lies at the basis of all relationships, it was the writer's overall objective to design a communication system that is relevant to parent needs and conceptually self-reinforcing. To achieve that end, the inclusion of all stakeholders was considered essential to the integrity of the practicum.

Particularly concerned with the inclusion of the regular classroom teacher as a member of the multi-disciplinary IEP team, Scanlon et al. (1985) contends that, regardless of the outcome of the IEP conference, the efficacy of the educational plan is contingent upon the commitment of the regular classroom teacher --- a view that is unconditionally shared by the writer.

Although Humes (1986) introduced an excellent plan to train parents to counsel their own peers with regard to the IEP process, the program was not considered for this project because it was entirely too comprehensive to be utilized in conjunction with other orientations. Moreover, local budget constraints would have precluded its consideration for the practicum project.

A similar approach was presented by Hughes and Ruhl (1987). Training teachers to facilitate parent participation in the IEP process, according to the authors, offers an excellent opportunity to gain effective parent participation during all stages relative to the IEP and to enlist them in other capacities that best serve the interests of their children (i.e., tutoring in areas of academic deficiency). Clearly, the writer is in accord with the notion that teachers must adopt roles as facilitators before, during, and after the IEP conference in order to produce sustained interest and encourage productive participation in the IEP process.

Summary

Over the past fifteen years, an abundance of literature has presented to address the issue of parent participation in the development of the IEP --- a right accorded under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). As a result, school personnel have initiated numerous parent advocacy programs and other interventions to enlist full parent participation in constructing educational goals for their children. While the national average indicates that approximately 75% of IEP conferences are currently attended by at least one parent, the quality and level of parent participation in the decision-making process is extraordinarily low.

A number of common factors emerged from the literature review. First, the maximization of parent potential in the IEP decision-making process is critical. Second, more research is needed to determine the types and degree of parent involvement that is required in order to best serve students. Third, a collaborative effort among members of a multi-disciplinary team is essential to effective IEP development. Fourth, there is a need to create programs that include motivational orientation and environmental enhancements for the purpose of inducing parents to become effective partners in the IEP process.

Despite expanded efforts by practicum school personnel to accomplish the parent-oriented goals which were specified by the federal mandate, parent/ professional partnerships still left much to be desired. Nonetheless, a consensus existed among all vested parties that effecting full parent participation is absolutely critical to the overall development of an IEP which, in every respect, is intended to reflect the differentiated needs and interests of the individual child.

Description of Selected Solutions

The writer was convinced that the development of pragmatically based strategies would engender a substantial increase in both parent attendance and productive parent participation during the IEP process at the practicum setting. In that light, a program was designed to encourage parents to become full and equal partners in the development of educational programs for their children as delineated by PL 94-142.

On November 20, 1991, permission for project implementation was obtained with full administrative support for its objectives. Moreover, all necessary resources and support mechanisms which were required to facilitate the effort were allocated. As a result of strong administrative commitment to the ideology that underlies parent involvement in the educational goals of their children, it was the writer's considered opinion that the practicum project had high potential for a successful outcome. Authorized to adopt a leadership position, the writer assumed full responsibility for all aspects of project implementation including the provision of inservices to parents and teachers and acting as a consultant to all vested parties.

Although the writer bore full responsibility for all aspects of project implementation, a number of other professionals impacted the practicum effort. For example, the "Quality Circle" was comprised of four exceptional education teachers, a regular classroom teacher who administers to SLD students, and two guidance department clerks who routinely interact with students and parents relative to testing and IEP activities. In addition, parent volunteers provided clerical assistance and other adjunct services. Finally, an adequate budget for practicum project materials was approved by the primary administrator.

In order to establish a relevant baseline, all parents and guardians of SLD students who had been invited to participate in an IEP conference during the current school year were selected for the project. The rationale for the selection process was based on the fact that documentation was currently in existence for this specific group. IEP audit files revealed the incidence of attendance, and teachers routinely maintained records of parent responses during IEP conferences on the Teacher Observation Form which was designed by the Quality Circle (Appendix C). As a result, baseline data were readily available with regard to both the incidence and type of parent participation during the conference experience.

Program development encompassed a combination of ideologies and methodologies that were presented in the literature with emphasis placed on a tailoring process to meet the specific requirements of the practicum school site. Orientation was based upon three goals which were targeted for realization upon termination of the practicum project: a 10% increase in the attendance rate of parents at IEP conferences; a 20% increase in active parent participation in the decision-making process during IEP development; and a 20% increase in parent perception of the importance of the IEP process itself and of their participation in same.

Because parent failure to understand the rights and assume designated responsibilities accorded under PL 94-142 is so prevalent, the writer devised a systematically based program, entitled "Empowering Parents of Junior High School SLD Resource Students During the Individual Education Plan Process. "Program development was based on overall parent needs to acquire a knowledge base that afforded them the opportunity to become fully participative, equal partners of the multi-disciplinary IEP conference team. To address these requirements, the practicum project sought to achieve its goals through the incorporation of several components.

First, teacher inservices were conducted by the writer to effect greater awareness on the part of exceptional educators as to the debilitating effects of parent non-attendance and non-participation. The focus was directed toward improving communication skills in order to facilitate effective parent involvement in pre-conference, conference, and post-conference experience.

Second, parent-teacher workshops were conducted by the writer to foster a parental knowledge base relevant to the privileges and responsibilities granted under the federal mandate and to encourage parental involvement in a wide variety of student activities --- focusing particularly on IEP development.

Third, written and oral communication took place on a regular basis. Parents receive weekly newsletters which were directed toward informing them of upcoming activities and presenting relevant topics in relation to mildly handicapped students (i.e., mainstreaming policies, learning strategies to apply at home, parent power as an investment in the nation's children). In addition to routine phone calls, parents received "Good News Calls" when improvement was demonstrated in students' academic and/or social profiles.

Fourth, in order to integrate the school based practicum effort with state mandated goals and objectives, the writer provided interim reports and sought feedback from the School Improvement Committee which was comprised of the primary administrator, exceptional and regular classroom teachers, parents, students, members of the business community, a union representative, and classified workers.

Fifth, parents were invited to fully participate in classroom and adjunct activities.

Sixth, throughout the project, one of the main objectives was to involve all shareholders in the process. Certainly the student were not the least of those. In that light, over the four month period, the writer held frequent parent/student/teacher conferences to establish continuity during program development and to interlink the shareholders in the IEP process.

Report of Action Taken

Throughout the practicum project, the primary objective was to involve parents in meaningful interaction with others for the purpose of providing a quality educational experience for their children. Parent involvement, according to Morgan (1982) and Morgan and Myette (1984) is a key factor in the production of a viable IEP. To this end, the following implementation plan took place from February 10, 1992 through May 31, 1992.

Weekly Implementation Plan

Week One

Events and Activities

During the first week of the project, all parents who were selected to participate in the practicum effort were contacted by the writer in order to update them on the goals and objectives underlying the project, to develop a rationale for their participation, to solicit their cooperation on behalf of the educational goals of their children, and to invite their participation in upcoming project events. Sixty-seven of the 90 participants were contacted by telephone. The remaining 23 received letters outlining program objectives. Follow-up calls were made at the end of the week to verify receipt of the written communication and to reinforce program objectives. Seventeen parents were ultimately reached while six remained unavailable. In addition, schedules outlining events for the upcoming orientation week were distributed to participating school-based personnel, and project materials were assembled, copied, and stored for future distribution.

Objectives

1. In addition to both the individual and collective responsibilities of all shareholders, parents were advised of the project purpose, expectations, duration, and upcoming events in order to facilitate project logistics.

2. School-based personnel were provided with relevant project information in order to facilitate scheduling.

3. Material assembly was achieved to conserve time during project implementation. Handouts for the project, unless otherwise specified, were provided by the district exceptional education department, Parents Education Network - Family Network on Disabilities, and the Parent to Parent organization.

Materials

1. Stationery and postage.

2. Copy paper.

Week Two

Events and Activities

During the orientation week, the writer conducted separate, informal, interactive inservices with the Quality Circle, School Improvement Committee, and Guidance Committee as well as with school administrators, exceptional education teachers, and selected members of the guidance staff. The purpose of the sessions was to orient all school-based personnel regarding project philosophy, objectives, ideology, methodology, role definition, and upcoming program events. Equally significant, the writer sought to establish the critical importance of collaborative effort to the ultimate success of the project. Following program description, members entered into a brainstorming format and provided relevant input which ultimately affected both the delivery modes and scheduling of practicum events.

Although invitations were scheduled to be mailed to parents for the Ex-Ed Extravaganza Night, which had been scheduled for the third week of the project, based on recommendations resulting from the brainstorming efforts of school-based personnel, the Quality Circle recommended a less complex entry level function. Therefore, invitations were mailed to invite parents to attend a "Parent/Professional Coffee" instead.

Objectives

1. Various committees and relevant personnel were apprised of project essentials in order to facilitate project logistics.

2. A rationale was established for collaborative effort in order to solicit full participation and quality input from school-based personnel.

Materials

1. Copies of Educating Children with Learning Problems (Will, 1986).

2. Copy paper (new agenda).

3. Stationery and postage (parent invitations).

Week Three

Events and Activities

An evening "Parent/Professional Coffee" was held to introduce parents and professionals to one another in an informal, relaxed setting. Fifty-one of the 90 practicum participants, two exceptional education teachers, one district inservice instructor, and attended. With a clear emphasis on parent participation in the IEP process, the two hour session was opened with a slide projector presentation by the district inservice instructor. The presentation included a comprehensive review of project goals and objectives, an entry level explanation of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, an agenda for project activities and events, and the introduction of various professionals who were associated with the project. A handout was provided: Educating Children with Learning Problems.

A Quality Circle meeting was convened to review and evaluate the events surrounding the "Parent/Professional Coffee." Members determined that project events were proceeding as anticipated.

The first Parent Clinic was held. Forty-two parents (23 of whom attended the "Parent/Professional Coffee"), two exceptional education teachers, and one district lead teachers were in attendance. An interactive workshop, the format provided for parents and professionals to assemble in groups of five or six to brainstorm ideas for facilitating effective parent communication during the IEP conference meeting. Using large sheets of art paper to record the flow of ideas, each table constructed a composite which was later shared with the entire group. A question/answer session followed in which parents posed relevant questions to professionals, and parents were given instructions on how to access information and support through the "Parent Help Hotline". Moreover, a proposed project agenda was presented for discussion and parent input. During the final phase, parents were provided with an opportunity to choose from program themes for upcoming project events from those generated during the clinic's interactive session or from those proposed by the writer during the developmental stage of the project. Ultimately, three were selected from the writer's slate of themes for future clinics: mainstreaming policies, learning strategies for home use, and parent power.

In addition, a discussion ensued regarding the feasibility of conducting Parent Clinics on a weekly basis. Because 34 of the 42 attending parents recommended monthly rather than weekly clinics, it was determined that the matter should be reconsidered by the Quality Circle (See Modifications and Deviations). In addition, eight parents volunteered to establish both a telephone and transportation network to encourage participation in project events.

The first weekly newsletter was mailed to all practicum participants. Contents included a schedule of upcoming practicum and general school events, a welcome to project participants from the writer, classroom teacher information on student organizational skills, and information pertaining to the rights and responsibilities of parents in the IEP process according to PL 94-142.

Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. Parents and professionals interacted for the purpose of exchanging ideas and participating in shared decision making.
2. Parents were provided with information relative to their rights and responsibilities under PL 94-142.

Materials

1. Copies of Educating Children with Learning Problems (Will, 1986).
2. Large sheets of art paper and markers.
3. Information sheet: Parent Help Hotline.
4. Overhead projector, transparencies, and pens.
5. District provided handouts relative to handicapping conditions and sources of parent information and assistance.
6. Postage and envelopes for newsletters.

Week Four

Events and Activities

The Quality Circle met to monitor progress and review and evaluate the recommendations of all shareholders. The following determinations emerged from the interactive session. First, future oral presentations which had been scheduled for the School Improvement Committee, Parent Advisory Committee, Guidance Committee, and other shareholders would be presented in written rather than oral mode in the interest of time. Second, at the request of participating parents, previously scheduled weekly Parent Clinics would be conducted on a monthly basis because of parent time constraints, and transportation network would be organized by parent volunteers to accommodate those who were lacking in that regard. Third, members agreed that staff and administrative discussions should be accomplished on an individual and informal basis because of the difficulty in assembling for scheduled meetings. Finally, it was determined that the writer would prepare a revised agenda to be distributed to all shareholders.

The scheduled School Improvement Committee was cancelled because of schedule modifications.

All shareholders were briefed relative to project changes and each was provided with an updated agenda. In the case of parent participants, updated versions were mailed.

The writer met with parent volunteers to discuss the effectiveness of the both the telephone and transportation networks. Six members attended. The chairperson reported that, while the 20 parents who had not yet attended one of the interactive events appreciative of the overture, only two expressed an interest in attending future program events. Eleven alluded to family or career problems, while seven expressed little to no interest in future participation. However, four of the seven state that they planned to attend future IEP conferences.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. A comprehensive review of shareholder input was conducted by the Quality Circle to monitor progress, evaluate recommendations, and to make necessary interim changes.
2. The writer conducted interactive sessions with parent volunteers to determine the effectiveness of the communication and transportation networks.

Materials

1. Copy paper (agenda for all shareholders).
2. Stationery and postage (newsletters).

Week Five

Events and Activities

At an evening meeting, memo format was used by the writer to update the Parent Advisory Committee regarding program events and the incidence and participation of all practicum participants. In addition, schedule changes and program modifications were included. The communique was accepted without note.

The Quality Circle met to design a survey instrument to document the degree of parent satisfaction with project programming. Members brainstormed ideas and concluded the meeting with the anticipation that an instrument would be produced during the sixth week meeting.

An informal meeting with exceptional education teachers and parent volunteers took place to monitor current activities and parent input. No additional recommendations were made at this time.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

A simulated IEP conference was conducted by the writer in which five parent volunteers, who had been acquired through the "Parent Help Hotline" participated in a simulated IEP conference. Adopting the roles of parent, exceptional education teacher, regular classroom teacher, guidance counselor, and school psychologist, participants interacted effectively with one another. Taking place in a relaxed setting, the two hour session allowed for role reversals and for a comprehensive explanation of IEP language and parent rights and responsibilities in that context. Although four of the five parent volunteers were extremely tentative at the onset, all were highly participative after the first thirty minutes.

Objectives

1. Parents assumed participative roles in a simulated IEP conference in order to facilitate development of communication skills, broaden their knowledge base with regard to roles, rights, and responsibilities of parents during the IEP process.
2. All advisory and monitoring committees were updated in order to render them as effective as possible during project implementation.

Materials

1. Copy paper (committee memos).

2. District level handouts (simulated IEP conference).

3. Stationery and postage (newsletters).

Week Six

Events and Activities

Of the 86 invited parent project participants (attrition rate reduced the beginning number by four), 13 accepted invitations to share in their child's daily activiti113s for a day. Attending classes and social events, parents interacted with other students and professionals within the educational environment. Four of the attending parents remained for the entire day, while seven attended for half of the school day and two observed only one class. All four of the day-long parents actively participated in classroom activities. Although a luncheon had been planned, it was decided that too few parents were in attendance. Therefore, as project guests, the remaining parents joined their children in the school cafeteria.

The Quality Circle met to continue its work on the

Parent Survey Instrument. After additional input from guidance counselors, the instrument was produced with the anticipation of use at approximately midpoint through the project.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. Parents were invited to attend school with their children in order to gain a broader understanding of the school environment and to convey parent interest to the child.

2. A Parent Survey Instrument was produced by the Quality Circle to gain information from parents regarding their perspectives on program efficacy.

Materials

1. Copy paper (survey and parent agenda for school visit).

2. Stationery and postage.

Week Seven

Events and Activities

A Parent Clinic was held during which a district inservice teacher delineated mainstreaming policies and the overall effects and benefits of mainstreaming as it relates to the Regular Education Initiative (REI). Both a slide projector presentation and a district made film were used to acquaint parents with the ideology that underlies mainstreaming as defined by PL 94-142. In addition, the district representative and the writer, accompanied by five volunteers from the previous simulated IEP conference, staged a similar conference experience for the group. Parents were highly participative in the question/answer session that followed. In addition to the personnel stated above, thirty eight parents and a regular classroom teacher attended and/or participated in the event.

The Quality Circle met to discuss REI objectives in relation to project goals. In addition, the committee reviewed the Parent Survey Instrument and determined that its content was highly relevant to the desired information.

Seven parents attended classes with their children. Of the seven, five remained for the entire day and two stayed until mid-day. The five who remained through the lunch period dined with the writer. Positive reactions to the experience were expressed by all five attendees.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. Parents assumed participative roles in a simulated IEP conference in order to facilitate development of communication skills and broaden their knowledge base with regard to roles, rights, and responsibilities of parents during the IEP process.

2. Parents were invited to attend school with their children in order to gain a broader understanding of the school environment and to convey parent interest to the child.

Materials

1. District made film: Mainstreaming of Mildly

Handicapped Kids.

2. Copy paper (Parent Survey Instrument).

3. Stationery and postage.

Week Eight

Events and Activities

The Quality Circle met to review recommendations by shareholders as to the type of criteria that should be used to establish parent response to project interventions during the first half of the project. Upon reviews of writer records of attendance and parent volunteer records of parent requests for information or assistance, it was determined that they were adequate measures of the parent response rate in terms of attendance. Moreover, it was determined that any attempt to measure parent involvement in the process itself would be premature and irrelevant in as much as parents were still in the process of learning.

Meeting with all shareholders on an informal basis, the writer provided a comprehensive review of project activities and commensurate parent attendance rates. Handouts were provided for committees, administrators and staff, and parents received the information in the weekly newsletter.

The Parent Survey Instrument was mailed to all 82 project participants (given an attrition rate of 8).

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. Parent surveys were mailed to derive accurate data from parents relative to their overall perspectives of the relevancy of project goals and program events and experiences.

2. The Quality Circle met to review and/or establish criteria for determining the effectiveness of parent participation in order to weigh the merits of project events in terms of parent needs.

3. All shareholders were provided with updated information concerning project events and parent participation in order to stimulate their continued support, participation, and input.

Materials

1. Copy paper (handouts).

2. Stationery and postage.

Week Nine

Events and Activities

The Quality Circle met to discuss the results of parent surveys. In as much as only 65% returns were available, the review was delayed pending anticipation of a greater advantage. Further, on the recommendation of both exceptional and regular education teachers, the committee decided to cancel the four previously scheduled workshops in which teachers were intended to inculcate variety of pre-conferencing, conferencing, and post conferencing communication skills. The decision was based on the unavailability of most teachers because of the requirement that they attend regular team meetings throughout this period. Therefore, it was concluded that district level printed material would be provided instead. In addition, the writer was readily available to provide information and/or assistance.

Nine parents attended classes with their children. Of the nine, eight remained for the entire day and one stayed for two periods. The eight who remained through the lunch period dined with the writer. Positive reactions to the experience were expressed by eight of the attendees, while one stated that her child suffered embarrassment because of her presence in the classroom.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. The Quality Circle met to review programming events in order to establish relevancy and feasibility.
2. Parents were invited to attend school with their children in order to gain a broader understanding of the school environment and to convey parent interest to the child.

Materials

1.Stationery and postage.

Week Ten

Events and Activities

The Quality Circle convened to review the Parent Survey Instruments. Of the 82 remaining parents, 77 responded. Sixty-nine responses were received by mail without prompting, six responded to a telephone request, and seven made no response. Of the respondees, 61 parents were extremely satisfied with programming, eleven reported that they were very satisfied, two were not satisfied, and two did not know.

A memo format was used to update the School Improvement Committee. A short question/answer session ensued and members articulated support for the project and its goals as they address the interests of restructuring. No recommendations were made at that time.

A memo format was used to update the Parent Advisory Committee. A heavy agenda precluded any discussion. The memo was noted, and there was no further disposition.

Although the Parent Clinic was scheduled to host a guest speaker from a local business concern to address current expectations of students who enter the work force, extremely inclement weather prevented the speaker's attendance. Despite poor attendance (13 parents and the writer), a simulated IEP conference was held. Two tables of six and seven comprise the two conference teams. Monitored by the writer, all parents had the opportunity to reverse roles, gain information regarding IEP language, and review parent rights and responsibilities. A question/answer session followed. All thirteen parents stated that a far greater understanding of the process had been realized from the experience.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. Parents participated in the simulated IEP meeting in order to facilitate skill enhancement so that they may effectively participate in the development of educational goals for their children.
2. The writer addressed both the Parent Advisory and School Improvement Committees in order to maintain

a high profile for project objectives and to maintain the continued support of individual members.

Materials

1.Copy paper (memos).

2. Stationery and postage.

Week Eleven

A Parent Clinic was held to aid parents in home based learning strategies in order to help children develop sound organizational skills. A district level trainer presented a district developed slide presentation to demonstrate desirable environmental conditions. A question/answer session ensued. Immediately following the presentation, the writer conducted a simulated IEP conference in the same format as previous simulations. In attendance were 37 parents, one exceptional education teacher, the primary administrator, and the writer.

Sixteen parents participated in school-based activities of their choice. Selecting a "job for a day", each parent assumed an important role in the school community (i.e., clerical duties, teacher assistance, tutor, media volunteer, cafeteria aide).

Box lunches were served and parents interacted with school-based personnel in the departments in which they were working.

The Quality Circle convened to review program considerations and make interim changes. None were recommended.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills. In addition, district level materials delineating pre-conferencing, conferencing, and post conferencing guidelines were included.

Objectives

1. A Parent Clinic was held to aid parents in in the generalization of learning strategies to the home environment.
2. Parents were invited to participate in school-based jobs to broaden their perspective on the school community.

Materials

1. District level hand-outs.

2. Box lunches.

3. Stationery and postage.

Week Twelve

Events and Activities

A Parent/Professional Coffee was held to allow interaction between parents and teachers relative to conferencing techniques and expectations. A district level representative joined the writer to facilitate the interaction. District level materials were used. Forty six parents attended. All were highly participative.

The writer interacted with all shareholders (committees and individuals) to apprise them of wrap-up activities and to update them on parent progress. The parent volunteer committee assisted by telephoning parent participants to remind them of upcoming IEP conferences.

Exceptional education teachers telephoned parents to aid in their understanding of conferencing techniques.

Objectives

1. A parent/professional interactive session was held to

develop rapport between the parties to the IEP and to further enhance communication and conferencing skills.

2. Writer oriented interaction with committees, school-based personnel, and parent participants was intended to keep all parties abreast of current events and maintain both enthusiasm and continued commitment.

Materials

1. District provided handouts.
2. Stationery and postage.

Week Thirteen

Events and Activities

The final Parent Clinic was held. Dubbed "An Ex-ed Extravaganza", the program was attended by 67 parents, two exceptional educators, a local parent organization inservice trainer, the primary administrator and assistant, and the writer. Emphasizing the critical importance of "parent power" in the IEP process and linking it to the guidelines that underlie PL 94-142, the inservice instructor conducted a slide presentation. A question/answer period followed and district level handouts were provided. Following the program, all parents were highly complimentary of the program and expressed a desire to become more participative in the IEP process.

The first notification was mailed to invite participating parents and their children to attend an IEP conference during the 15th week of the project.

The Quality Circle met to review program developments and make recommendations if necessary. None were made.

The writer interacted with all shareholders (committees and individuals) to apprise them of wrap-up activities and to update them on parent progress. The parent volunteer committee assisted by telephoning parent participants to remind them of upcoming IEP conferences.

Exceptional education teachers contacted 76 of the 80 remaining parent participants by telephone (10 less by attrition). Four were unable to be reached.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. The clinic presentation was intended to engender a clear understanding of parent rights and responsibilities as defined by PL 94-142 and to convey to parents the critical necessity of their effective participation in the development of their child's IEP.

2. Interaction with parent participants was intended to prepare them for the IEP conference experience at the end of the project.

Materials

1. District designed handouts (clinic).

2. Stationery and postage.

Week Fourteen

Events and Activities

A final Parent Clinic was held to address the subject of higher education for learning disabled students. Although a guest speaker was to have spoken to vocational interests, the college with whom the arrangements had been made sent a math and science oriented professor instead. An interactive discussion followed during which job descriptions were paralleled with specific areas of skill development. Although the speaker was not oriented to the area of disabilities, the 53 attending parents found the information relevant, reality-based, and extremely helpful to their ability to focus on future educational goals for their children.

The second notification to invite participating parents and their children to attend an IEP conference during the 15th week of the project was made by telephone. The parent volunteer group contacted all participating parents. There were no exceptions.

A final Parent Coffee was held to provide an interactive session in which parents could further develop interactive skills and clarify roles. Thirty-eight parents attended. Six groups of six or seven participants were monitored by the writer. All participating parents expressed the view that their confidence levels had improved substantially and that they were more appreciative of their roles in connection with the educational goals of their children.

Weekly News Letters were sent to all participating parents and Good News Letters were sent to parents of students who demonstrated improvement in either academic or social skills.

Objectives

1. During the clinic experience, parents were expected to demonstrate appropriate interactive skills during the simulated IEP conference setting.

Materials

1. Stationery and postage.

Week Fifteen

Events and Activities

Although it was intended to bring shareholders together to take part in pre-termination procedures, the final project function did not take place as planned. Because of both time constraints which seriously impacted teachers involved with teaming requirements and the advent of the final examination phase, the function was cancelled. Instead, a written format with writer support was selected. Committees and individual shareholders were provided with written instructions and guidelines regarding termination procedures (i.e., pre-conferencing with individual teachers, scheduling for IEP conferences, parent roles during the IEP conference, and plans for program continuance).

IEP conferences were held for children of all project participants. The incidence of parent attendance was recorded and the degree of parent participation was documented by an exceptional education teacher on a Teacher Observation Form (Appendix C).

Following IEP conferences, the 66 attending parents completed the Parent Questionnaire. Data was sought from the 14 non-attending parents by telephone. Using the Parent Questionnaire form, parent voluneers completed the forms according to answers provided by the parent.

Objectives

1. Participating parents joined with their children and members of a multi-disciplinary IEP conference team to demonstrate their ability to effectively participate during the development of educational goals and objectives.

Materials

1. IEP conference materials.

2. Copy paper.

Week Sixteen

Events and Activities

A comprehensive review was completed by the writer during the final week of the project. An audit of all IEP files relative to children of project participants provided documentation of the incidence of parent attendance. Parent participation was determined by a review of the Teacher Observation Forms which were used to determine the degree and quality of parent participation during the terminal IEP conference (Appendix C). A comparison between baseline and terminal data was undertaken to complete the final evaluation of project objectives. Assistance in gathering and tallying data was provided by parent volunteers.

The writer briefly addressed year-end sessions of both the School Improvement Committee and the Parent Advisory Committee. Final data were shared with members who expressed appreciation for the quality of the project, its relevancy to overall school philosophy, and the terminal results. Moreover, continuance of the program was requested. In response, the writer assured both committees of program continuance.

Objectives

1. Terminal data were gathered, reviewed, and documented for the purpose of determining the degree of improvement in parent attendance and parent participation over baseline data.

2. Both the School Improvement Committee and the Parent Advisory Committee were apprised of terminal project data in order to solicit their continued support for the program and its objectives.

Materials

1. Copy paper (final reports).

Deviations and Modifications

Several deviations and modifications transpired throughout project development. Based on pragmatic considerations and developed on the recommendations of the shareholders, they were considered to be in the best interests of the goals and objectives of the project.

During the second week of the project, invitations were to have been mailed for an "Ex-ed Extravaganza", an event which was ultimatley deemed too complex for an entry level function by the Quality Circle.

During the third week of the project, a Parent/Professional Coffee was held in lieu of the then postponed "Ex-ed Extravaganza". Participants had the opportunity to develop rapport and gain information in a relaxed setting. An interactive session allowed for parent input and the recommendation was made that Parent Clinics be held monthly instead of weekly because of time constraints and transportation problems that impact most parents in the practicum setting. The Quality Circle concurred and the recommendation became a reality.

During the fourth week of the project, the Quality Circle reviewed further recommendations of the shareholders, and it was determined that oral presentations to school-based committees should be limited to the entry level presentation with all subsequent information being provided in writing to conserve committee and staff time. In addition to the change from a weekly to a monthly format for Parent Clinics, it was determined that parent volunteers would man a parent help and transportation hotline in order to foster greater parent attendance at project programs. In still another move to facilitate program logistics, it was decided that school-based personnel would be briefed on an informal basis rather than briefed at scheduled meetings because of the difficulty in assembling personnel because of the impact of conference requirements within the teaming structure at the junior high school level.

During Week Five, two events were added. First, a writer meeting with exceptional education teachers and parent volunteers was conducted to open channels for greater input. Second, a simulated IEP conference was was conducted by the writer to enhance volunteer skills in the IEP conference setting.

During Week Eight, Parent Survey Instruments were mailed to project participants. Because the instrument was originally intended to be completed during a weekly Parent Clinic (which had been modified in favor of a monlthly format), the change was necessary in order to gain required data.

During Week Ten, a non-scheduled Quality Circle meeting was held to review data which was generated from the Parent Survey Instruments. In another unanticipated change, parents were required to accommodate to a change in programming because inclement weather prohibited the presence of a local business guest speaker at the Parent Clinic. Instead, a simulated IEP session was conducted by the writer.

During Week Eleven, a series of four teacher workshops which were geared toward the faciliation of pre-conference, conference, and post-conference techniques were cancelled because of teacher inability to allocate enough time to participate. In liew of the interactive experience, district level materials were provided to assist teachers in developing rapport with parents and aiding them in coping with IEP conference responsibilities.

During Week Twelve, the previously scheduled Quality Circle meeting was cancelled for lack of need. Originally intended to provide an opportunity to brainstorm themes and choose one for an upcoming Parent Clinic, previous selection of theme by parents rendered the task unnecessary.

During Week Thirteen, the "Ex-ed Extravaganza Night" which had been scheduled for the third week of the project took place.

During Week Fourteen, a Parent Coffee was added to give participants the opportunity for greater skill enhancement.

During Week Fifteen, the previously scheduled Final Project Function was not held. Complicated by time constraints and the workload that routinely surrounds the advent of final examinations, it was determined to be in the best interest of all to provide a written account of project termination procedures along with writer support.

CHAPTER V

Results, Discussion and Recommendations

Results

Because the problem in the practicum setting was that a substantial number of junior high school parents of SLD resource students, who should be actively engaged in the planning of their childrens' IEPs, were either declining to attend IEP conferences or were failing to assume a participative role during the planning stages of the IEP, there was a demonstrative need to effect a solution strategy to remedy the situation. Parent involvement was such a prominent factor in practicum school philosophy that all educators in the setting were deeply invested in collaborative effort. However, despite the best efforts of the school community, the problem persisted. Thus, it became imperative to address the issue of parent involvement as it related to the goals and objectives of exceptional children.

In seeking a solution strategy, the writer was committed to the precepts and aspirations of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142).

Therefore, a combination of ideologies and methodologies which were gleaned from the literature underlay project orientation. Program development was predicated upon parent need to become equal partners in the IEP process. Therefore, the project was comprised of the following components: instructing teachers in the art of communication in order to facilitate parent involvement in the conference setting; parent/teacher workshops to provide parents with a clear understanding of the rights and responsibilities accorded them under PL 94-142; the provision of parent information concerning pertinent topics pertaining to exceptional children; collaboration with relevant school-based personnel and advisory committees; integration with national and state mandated goals and objectives for exceptional students; parent involvement within both the overall school community and their child's individual classroom; and parent/student/teacher conferences which were geared toward collaboration in the best interests of the student. Overall, it was the writer's opinion that an integrated approach presented the best solution strategy to the practicum setting problem.

The following project objectives were sought.

1. At the end of the four month project, a 10% increase in the current parent attendance rate at IEP conferences will be demonstrated by the practicum group. Measurement will be effected by writer scrutiny of Guidance Department records of the audit files to ascertain the number of target parents who attended year-end conferences.

This objective was achieved. Of the 90 participating parents, 59 attended the baseline IEP conference (approximately 66% of the total). The terminal IEP conference was attended by 66 of the remaining 80 practicum participants (approximately 83% of the total) --- a differential of 14%.

2. At the end of the four month project, a 20% increase in active parent participation in the decision-making process during the IEP conference will be demonstrated by attending members of the practicum group. Measurement will be effected by a school-based observational instrument which will be recorded by the attending SLD resource teacher for each

attending parent in three categories: information-provision response, decision-making response, and non-response.

This objective was achieved. At the baseline reading, 32 of the 59 attending parents participated in the decision-making process during the IEP conference (approximately 54% of the total). At the terminal reading, 54 of the 66 attending parents participated in the decision-making process (approximately 82% of the total) --- a differential of 28%.

3. At the end of the four month project, a 20% increase will be demonstrated by the practicum group in parent perception of the importance of the IEP process itself and of parent participation as full and equal partners in the collaborative endeavor to enhance student success in educational pursuits. Measurement will be effected by a writer generated questionnaire which will be completed by the practicum parents.

This objective was achieved. At the baseline reading, only 13 of the 59 participating parents perceived the IEP conference itself and their participation in the collaborative effort as an important factor in achieving quality educational goals for their children (approximately 22%). At the terminal reading, 61 of the remaining 80 parent participants perceived the IEP conference itself and their participation in the collaborative effort as an important factor in achieving quality educational goals for their children (approximately 76%) --- a differential of 54%.

Discussion

Overall, the practicum results are excellent. The data suggest that there has been a substantial improvement in parent attendance, parent participation in the IEP process, and in parent perception of the IEP process itself and of their roles as cfllaborators. The baseline data indicated that most parents, whether they attended the conference or not, were disassociated from the decision-making process that guided the development of their child's IEP. Clearly, there has been a marked improvement in all areas.

As a result, the implications for exceptional students are clear. With parents assuming their rightful roles as equal partners in the IEP process, the educational goals and objectives can be tailored to the differentiated needs of students on a far more relevant basis. Although multi-disciplinary teams comprise an amalgamation of expertise, the absence or non-participation of the parent precludes the team from addressing many of the affective needs that can only be revealed by a close family member. Clearly, the participation of parents in the IEP process at the practicum setting has been a major enhancement.

Moreover, the implications for the practicum setting are substantial. In light of increased parent participation in the IEP process, the objectives underlying school philosophy relative to parent involvement and collaboration can be more easily achieved. Although parent participation for basic education students has been excellent, it was a major concern of educators in the school community that parents of exceptional students were not responding to the call for global parent involvement. However, from the onset of the project, parents of exceptional students have begun to assume a variety of positions within the school setting. Sitting on advisory teams, monitoring hallways, acting as teacher assistants, and volunteering for clerical duties are just a few of the enhancements that the educational setting is experiencing.

In addition to the positive implications for both the exceptional student and for the practicum setting, perhaps the implications for the restructuring effort are even more important --- for it is in that effort that the realization of the goals and objectives for all shareholders will be realized. Reaching beyond parochial perspectives, school reform addresses the global issues that guide the nation's educational system. Undoubtedly, the increased incidence and participation of parents of exceptional children enhances the integrative goals connected with the mainstreaming effort --- thus maximizing the potential for the restructuring of American schools (Will, 1986).

Although there were a few unanticipated outcomes throughout the project, they were ultimately enhancing. For example, inservices and workshops were primary components of the original project design. Because the focus was clearly predicated upon collaboration, bringing a variety of persons with diverse backgrounds to a collaborative front was an attractive strategy to the writer. However, the time constraints that were imposed upon both regular and exceptional education teachers because of the new requirements for teaming at the junior high school level were extraordinary. As a result, the decision to conduct less formal sessions (i,e,, smaller groups and meetings with individuals at mutually agreed upon times) was based on the need to relieve teachers of the stress associated with extraordinarily tight schedules. Adopting a liaison position, the writer was able to effect integration between the various factions and shareholders. Ultimately, by relieving a stressful situation for teachers, high quality input and a strong commitment to the collaborative effort was realized.

In a similar vein, parents opted to participate in workshops on a monthly basis instead of on a weekly basis for many of the same reasons. Family and career pressures often impacted parent ability to attend scheduled meetings. However, many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to provide the input that was to change the schedule of events. To accommodate those parents who had questions or needed assistance, a telephone hotline was established. Overall, both the modification and addition were positive factors.

One other unanticipated event lay in the discrepancy that was realized between teacher perceptions of parent involvement in the baseline IEP and that of parents. Clearly, teachers accorded a much higher incidence of parent participation than did parents themselves. Alluding to the Lynch and Stein (1982) report, the writer speculates that there may have been a misperception regarding the terminology itself. For instance, the authors suggest that the terminology which is historically linked to parent involvement in the IEP process (i.e., "parent attendance" and "parent participation") is actually subject to broad interpretation. Moreover, parents may feel less adequate because of lack of familiarity with the surrounding as well. In that case, it would be likely that parent perceptions of self-importance could be substantially diminished.

In summary, the deviations, modifications, and additions were considered as a part of the evolutionary process that ultimately contributed to the global perspective that underlies collaborative effort.

Recommendations

1. In as much as the public education system is

currently plagued by budgetary constraints that impact teacher class loads and time, it is recommended that high profile gatherings be limited to one or two sessions (i.e., Parent/ Professional Coffee and Ex-ed Extravaganza Night). Informal, less time consuming, individual meetings have the potential to produce broader interest and commitment to project objectives.

2. In as much as parents are subject to a wide variety of family and career problems, it is recommended that monthly high-interest, hands-on events be scheduled. In addition, the provision of a telephone hotline has the capability of connecting parents with peers and providing information and assistance on a need basis.

3. In as much as parent involvement in their child's educational goals is critical to maximizing student potential, it is recommended that parent participation in school-based academic and extra-curricular activities be encouraged through the development of a parent support group. The object of the group would be to determine parent interests and match them with specific duties within the school community in order to foster greater parent

participation. In addition, the group could provide a support base for parents by holding interactive sessions and providing direction to social services when necessary.

4. In as much as parent input is essential to the success of the project, it is recommended that a "Parent Input Box" be placed in a convenient, but private, location within the school complex so that parents may express anonymously.

Dissemination

1. The writer will conduct an on-premises inservice to provide school-based personnel with first hand knowledge of the results of the project and to connect its goals and objectives to the overall school philosophy as well as to the state and national agendae. The purpose of the inservice is to foster program continuance and to effect a commitment from school-based personnel.

2. The writer will act as a resource person for all parties interested in adopting programs in which parents have the potential to become equal partners in the IEP process.

3. The writer will conduct inservices at district level schools in order to foster the development of viable programs which include parents in all aspects of the child's education and, in particular, in the development of the IEP.

4. From the onset of implementation, the writer has networked to provide and exchange information relative to parent involvement in the school community. Disseminating information through several organizations in which she is a pro-active officer, chair, or member, the writer has encouraged the adoption of quality parent programs in order to satisfy the goals and ideals of PL 94-142. As a result, numerous educators within the practicum setting itself and within the district have expressed an interest in the ideology and the methodology underlying the project goals. At this writing, interested parties are awaiting project results.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

PRACTICUM SCHOOL

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did the attending parent ask questions during the IEP conference?

2. If so, please circle the title of the IEP team member to whom the question was directed?

   a. Exceptional education teacher.

   b. Regular classroom teacher.

   c. Guidance Counselor.

   d. Other (Please specify).

3. Were questions relevant to the discussion? (Please specify: yes, no, or sometimes)

4. Did the attending parent ask more than three questions?

5. Did the attending parent appear to understand the responses to the questions?

6. Did the attending parent offer information during the IEP conference?

7. If so, what type of information was provided?

8. If so, was the information voluntary, or was it solicited?

9. Was the information pertinent to the discussion? (If not, please state why)

10. Did the attending parent participate in decision making?

11. If so, was it voluntary, or was it solicited?

12. Did the attending parent appear to be satisfied with the IEP goals and objectives?

13. Did the attending parent appear to be satisfied with the overall conference?

14. Was there any indication that the parent felt inadequate in the IEP setting?

If so, please explain.

15. Please comment on any other area of relevancy.

APPENDIX B

PRACTICUM SCHOOL

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

PRACTICUM SCHOOL

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Parents:

In an effort to maximize your child's learning experience, (Practicum School) needs your participation and reaction to the IEP Conference meeting. Please answer the following questions so that, together, we may better serve our children.

1. Did you attend your child's annual IEP conference?

2. Did you have opportunities to ask questions during the IEP conference?

3. If so, please circle the title of the IEP team member(s) to whom you directed the question?

   a. Exceptional education teacher.

   b. Regular classroom teacher.

   c. Guidance counselor.

   d. Other (Please specify).

4. Were you satisfied with the answers? (Please specify: yes, no, or sometimes)

5. Did you ask more than three questions?

6. If so, what were they?

7. Were you satisfied with the responses of team members? (Please specify: yes, no or sometimes)

8. Did you provide information to other team members during the IEP conference?

9. If so, what type of information?

10. If information was provided, did you volunteer the information, or were you asked to provide it?

11. Did you participate in decision-making as it related to your child's IEP during the conference?

12. If so, did you volunteer, or were you asked to participate?

13. Did you receive a full explanation of the objectives and goals of your child's IEP?

14. Were you satisfied with the explanation?

15. Were you satisfied with the participation of the other members of the conference team?

16. Were you satisfied with the overall conference?

17. Do you feel that it is important to attend your child's IEP conference?

18. Do you feel that you were provided with enough information by school personnel to give you the knowledge to be able to fully participate in making decisions concerning your child's education?

19. Do you feel that you want or need to know more about the IEP process?

20. Do you feel that it is important to take part in the decision-making process concerning your child's educational goals?

21. What recommendation can you make for improving the IEP conference meeting?

APPENDIX C

TEACHER OBSERVATION FORM

PRACTICUM SCHOOL
TEACHER OBSRVATION FORM
FOR
IEP CONFERENCE

	Yes	No
1. Parent attended the IEP conference.		
2. Parent asked questions during the conference.		
If so, what type of question?		
3. Parent asked more than 3 questions.		
4. Parent appeared to understand responses to questions.		
5. Parent offered pertinent information concerning the child during the conference.		
6. Parents made suggestions regarding goals or objectives for the child.		
7. Parent made suggestions regarding the child's classroom instruction.		
8. Parent actively engaged in the		

decision-making process.

	Yes	No
9. Parent expressed satisfaction with the goals and objectives in the IEP.		
10. Parent expressed the need to be better informed on conference procedures.		
11. Parent appeared to be comfortable in the conference setting.		
12. Parent expressed satisfaction with the overall conference.		

PLEASE COMMENT ON ANY OTHER AREA OF RELEVANCY